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PCZONE

ISSUE 181 JUNE 2007

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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

COVER STORY

42

FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

It shoots, but does it score? The biggest footy management sim is about to go large...

NEVERQUEST 123

"I run up the stairs like Rocky, punching the air"

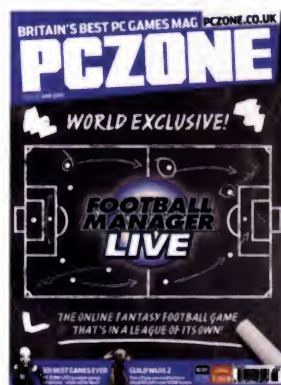


LEFT 4 DEAD

WE GET INFECTED BY VALVE'S
TERRIFYING CO-OP SHOOTER

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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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Too busy? PC ZONE in 54 words...
All kinds of everything this month, with about 150 games aching to be read about, maybe more. We haven't actually counted, as numbers that high don't make sense – you might as well say LOADS AND LOADS AND LOADS for half an hour. What are you reading this for? There's GAMES in there, you fool!



CRUEL SPORT

FIRST, APOLOGIES IF you don't like football – do yourself a favour, skip this bit and check out the sparkly new redesigned Letters on page 10 instead.

If you're still here though, thanks. I need to rant, to confide in another football fan at a time when my faith in the sport is being shaken to the core. The reason? Leeds United.

At the time of writing, my team have just lost a crucial away game at Colchester, and are third from bottom with only a handful of matches left to play. While to the majority of footy fans this is hilarious (thanks Will and Clare), to me, it's a violent Alton Towers ride of emotions; from elation to the pit of despair in ten minutes. Who would choose to put themselves through this? If I'd been treated this badly in a relationship, I'd have left them years ago and gone to battered partners' counselling.

Which is why Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* series is so essential – it's the closest thing we've got to recreating the daily masochistic obsession that all true fans have. *FM Live* is an exciting, accessible new game that you can read about on page 42, while also having an opportunity to win one of 25 exclusive Beta keys.

And by the time you read this, I should know whether it's second of third-tier football for us next season. The suffering continues...

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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Games for Windows LIVE

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The mania that's not for minors – prepare yourself for bliss and dementia on a grand scale

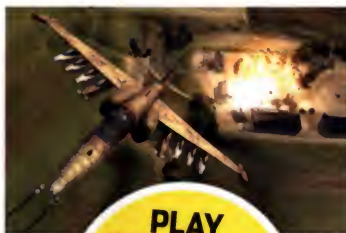
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FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE BETA KEYS!

44

PLAY
FM LIVE
FIRST - 25
BETA KEYS
UP FOR
GRABS!

101 BEST GAMES EVER

"Beyond Good & Evil is a jewel of harmony North and character - it's right on unforgotten!"

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BEST EVER!

47 101 BEST GAMES EVER
We used science, beer and a month of bickering to bring you the definitive list of PC games nirvana...

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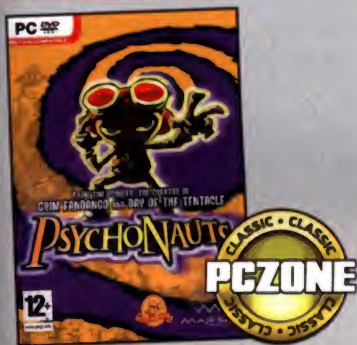
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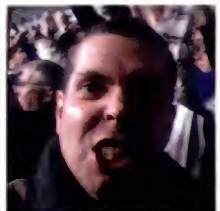
Turn to page 118 for
more information

Closing date: December 31, 2007



MEET THE TEAM

It's the meat that's teeming



JAMIE SEFTON
King God of All
AGE: 37
LIKES: Leeds United
DISLIKES: Relegation
FANCIES: Diva J
FAVE GAME: *Half-Life 2*
PLAYING NOW:
Soldier Of Fortune II

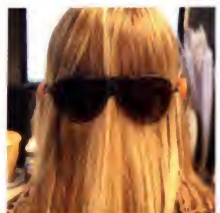
As PC ZONE's unassuming wallflower, Jamie Sefton shies away from the spotlight. He's never happier than when he's tending to his prize-winning begonias, sipping a nice cup of tea on the veranda and sighing at the beauty of a butterfly. Yawning daintily, he can often be seen starting up a game of *PES*, before screaming cheerfully at his joypad, coyly blaspheming the gods of all cultures and playfully putting his fist through a window. And then it's bedtime for Sefters, as he rubs his eyes and slips into his jim-jams, and dreams about buttercups.



WILL PORTER
The Ghostly Duke
Will's neighbours are very much in love. And when two people are in love, they like to express that by cuddling. Very noisily, and, this weekend, three times in one night. Will has bags under his eyes.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Fahrenheit



JON 'LOG' BLYTH
The Fattest Hobo
Log's latest idiot freelance venture involves writing three hours of scripts to be dubbed over Eastern European videos of monkeys climbing into pianos. He wishes he was making it up, but he isn't.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Peggle Deluxe



SUZY WALLACE
Super Princess Peach
Suzy started her career as the female passenger in *OutRun*. After stints as Ms Pac-Man and Regina from *Dino Crisis* (a personal low), she finally made it to PCZ, where she is treated as a real human girl.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Oblivion: Shivering Isles



KEVIN PRUITT
No Fixed Adobe
Kevin coughed, sneered and grumbled throughout this month's back-page photoshoot, as we discussed how better to make 'I'm A Mac' guy look like an idiot. He still thinks Macs aren't bum.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Myst, lol



STEVE HOGARTY
The Winking Viscount
Steve is so adorably young and naive, he still hasn't worked out that all living things must die, never to return. He thinks they're all hiding in a room, waiting to throw him a surprise party. Bless.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
STALKER: SOC



CLARE LYDON
The People's Empress
Clare often disappears at lunchtime, coming back damp and exhausted. She claims to have gone to the gym, but rumour has it she's been sneaking off to Regent's Park and punching the geese.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Worldgoose Suckerpunch III

STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Four-day network maintenance without warning, moving office on the day of our deadline without warning, the extortionate price of Innocent smoothies, Steve's grotesque hallucinating illness, £2.60 for a bacon roll and foreign people not knowing the word 'cob'

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

THREE TIMES IN ONE NIGHT?	125 Mins	Surely that's not a couple. No-one fancies their partner that much
NATHAN BARLEY IN OUR MIDST	59 Mins	And how Log slipped into the back page's 'I'm A Prick' act far too comfortably
KRISPY KREME	30 Mins	I don't care if they're free, they're downstairs. Downstairs is MILES away
THE OLD TXT ZONE MOBILE	50 Mins	Does anyone still own a phone with an external antenna?
COMPANIES WITH ROFL IN THEIR NAMES	211 Mins	So far we've got Aeroflot, and that's it
JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE 85-STONE MAN	143 Mins	'Hey, I lost that keyring when I was 38 stone!'
FACEBOOK	78 Mins	Will discovers the phenomenon of online social networking. Whatever next? Friendster?
SCOOSH	84 Mins	At last, a Eurovision entry we can be proud of. And watch, again and again, on YouTube
SPUNK	49 Mins	No matter how many times you see those 'funny' jpegs, seeing a real box of sweets called Spunk still raises a smile
THOSE BUREAUCRATS IN BRUSSELS	65 Mins	Those banana-straightening, inch-hating bastards, or something

WIN!

Tiny Compo is like the siren on the rocks, luring randy sailors into her minuscule bosom with her bewitching song. They think she's far away, but she's not - and that's why they crash their boats. It's all very clever. Anyway, Mark Rooney won this month, with his excellent reiteration of the 'Chernobyl Fallout' joke. Well done sir: A prize is winging its way to you as we speak. Send your answers to this month's Tiny Compo to 'Everybody Gonf! Gonf!', c/o Tiny Compo 181, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Tweet tweet!

LETTERS



Will Porter waits patiently by the letterbox, before running in circles and barking excitedly



KING OF LETTERS

WOW WHINGE

So, 93% for *WOW: BC* – that's quite an achievement yet again for Blizzard. Why you and every other drone continue to flock around this game as if it is the messiah of all games is beyond me. I have played *WOW* since release, completed every instance and raised multiple characters to 60. It took me far too long to realise what a waste of time it all was.

Yet again no-one picks up the endless grinding and repetition of sitting in an instance, that you've done 100 times before, in the hopes of obtaining that one precious item, only to walk into Iron Forge and see 20 other people with it. Blizzard, meanwhile, have killed the prospect of any true world PVP through forcing anyone who wishes to compete in PVP to camp instance after instance. *BC* has been released and done what? Implement more items for me to grind out on? Add two new races that are nothing but new skins that won't make



Worn down by the daily grind.

existing players abandon their original characters? Include flying mounts that are entertaining for all of ten minutes? Best nip off and grind some gold for that! I won't even begin to get into how the game design stifles any character creativity and has class designs that are so outdated it's bewildering...

But sadly, your letters section isn't long enough to list every problem with this game, and I'm sure eight million subscribers can't be wrong...

Lewis Burnell

Lewis Burnell, I think I love you. You maxed out multiple *WOW* characters and then realised it was all about grinding? All your criticisms are valid

WIN!



Want to be King Of Letters? Well you best get writing then. Every month, we'll reward our chosen royalty with PNY's limited-edition 7600GT PCI-E *Splinter Cell* bundle, retailing for £99.99. For more on PNY Technologies, check out www.PNY-Europe.com

– but in those countless hours you pumped into *Azerath*, I don't think you can deny that you were having fun – perhaps lots of fun. In many ways *WOW* is outdated, but it sounds to me that you've outgrown *WOW* rather more than it necessarily being a bad game. For providing a rebel's stance on affairs though, I hereby award you a graphics card.

According to the Urban Dictionary, a 'wonker' is a penis.



Wonkers?

CUTE SHOOT

I was round at a mate's house yesterday and he was loading up a demo of *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey*. It was at this point that we discovered a purple gorilla robot quite near the start of the game. What do you reckon is the cutest 'little animal thing' from any game? I now know that mine would be Wonkers from *Dreamfall*.

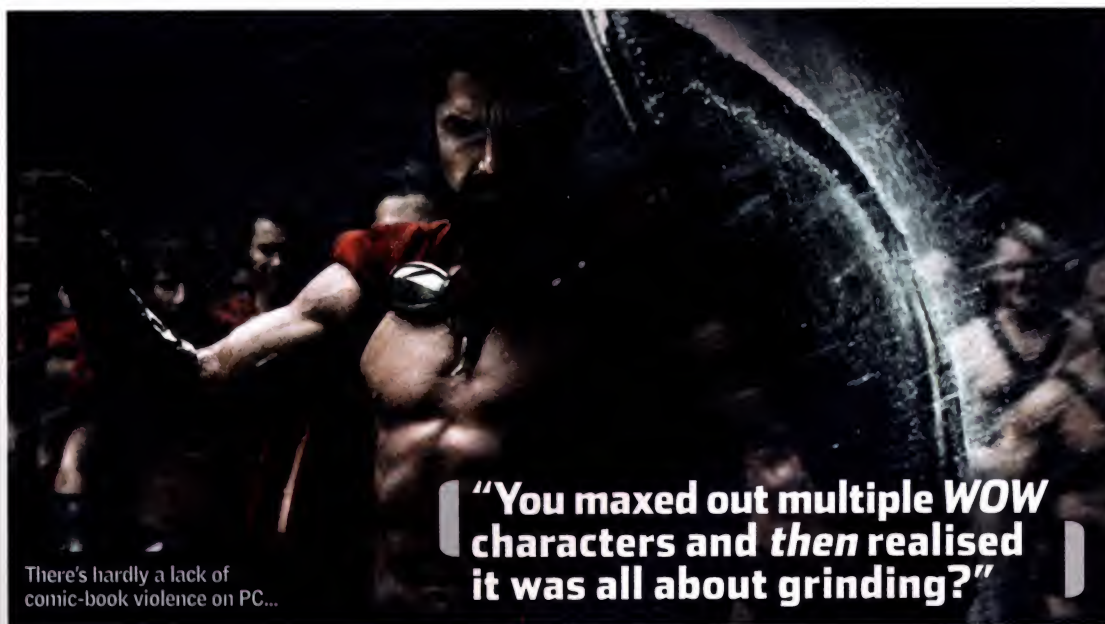
Charlie Latimer

Tough one Charlie. Perhaps the little bugs you chuck in *Half-Life*? My pet Gurky that trails around after me in *WOW*? Nah – my favourite furry

companion will always be Dogmeat from *Fallout*. His ball-biting abilities perhaps weren't cute in the strictest sense, but I liked him for it...

I HATE PIRATE SCUM

After reading Jolly Roger's letter about downloading pirate games last issue, I felt I must counter. Well I will, right after I pop round to his house and steal his ninja rig, because (although he probably paid good money for the parts and spent months putting it together), I want it. So I'll go take it, yeah? No, of course not, it's patently wrong – just like his suggestions of downloading games



There's hardly a lack of comic-book violence on PC...

"You maxed out multiple WOW characters and then realised it was all about grinding?"

for free from torrent sites. The people who make games and other software put time and effort into it. They use resources such as electricity, paper and office space, all of which need paying for, and these developers have every right to charge a price for their services. Could he make a *Half-Life 2* without incurring any expenses? Jolly Roger is a thief, plain and simple.

Michael Hunter

I couldn't agree more, Michael. I know people who regularly download games from torrents, and they do so automatically, compulsively and with nary a thought for anything but their instant (well, overnight) gratification. And if it's screwing over the sales of big games, just think what it's like for the small fry. We've got roving reporter Pavel Barter writing a special report on this topic next issue.

TONIGHT WE GAME IN HELL

After witnessing the spectacle that is *300* at the cinema last weekend, I can only hope that some awesome developer has decided to make a game out of it. Unreal Engine 3, slow-motion on impact as you chop some dude's leg off? Yes please. I'm praying to the Spartan gods. Any news?

Jack Mason

There was a *300* game on PSP, Jack, but it's supposed to be a bit 'guff' – plus only knobs own PSPs (IMHO). As

for limb hackage – there's a mite of that going on in *Dark Messiah* and I think that's as close as you're going to get in the short term.

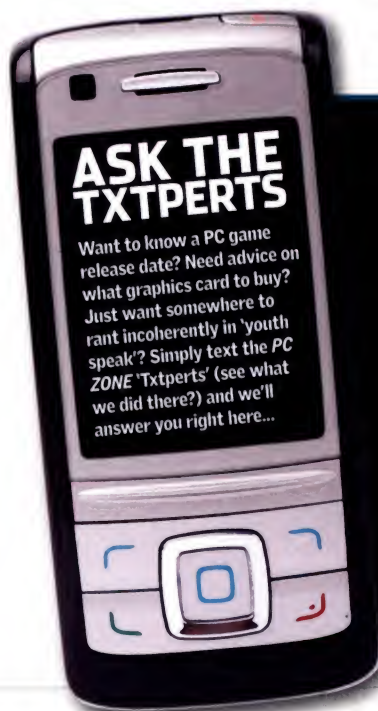
WHO GIVES YOU ZX-TRA?

I've subscribed to *PC ZONE* for four years now, and I was just looking through my back issues when I found a small booklet called *ZX*, which covered all kinds of interesting things about *Unreal Tournament 2004*. I also noticed that Korda said inside that we could expect to get *ZX* every three months or so. That was in October 2003, and I

haven't seen one since! Did something incredibly sinister happen to halt production? Did you just all decide it was too much hard work? Or have I been accidentally throwing them in the bin, thinking they were advertising for some sort of luxury spa treatment?

Richard King

Oh yeah, that thing. Erm. Well, you can either assume we were talking in 'Jupiter months' or perhaps that it turned out that it was all a bit of a fuff and we never really got around to doing another one. Also – do we really have luxury spa brochures falling out of our mag, or have you been at your mum's subscription copy of *Hello!* again?



I thought *BioShock* was sposed to b out now. When is it?

Franki

Sigh... *BioShock* now has a confirmed release date of 24 August. Next!

Resi Evil on PC sucks big balls. Might as well have flushed my cash down the shitter.

RobOtnik

Eloquently put. Y'know, if you got into sonnet writing you could give that Shakespeare fellow a run for his money.

Is Steve Hogarty really Irish?

Paul H

Yes. And no, he won't do jigs on demand. You buy the Guinness, he does the jigs.

WTF is up with PCZone?

noname

WTF is up with you? Sigh. Alexander Graham Bell must be turning in his grave...



**SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
WIN A FREE GAME!**

GOTHIC 3

Sent in by Rick Lane, Bury

PC ZONE score: 85%

I didn't know that *Vampire: Bloodlines* had a beardy brother until I played *Gothic 3* – their familial similarities lying in the fact that they are both good games that were released too early. *Gothic 3* has more bugs than a termite mound, and they're not just irritating bugs that occasionally bite you until you slap them down with a patch. No, some of these are giant malaria-laden mosquitoes that will eat your computer whole.

However, if you can get it booted up, *Gothic 3* is a pretty good RPG. While melee combat is lacklustre, the world is engaging and beautiful and the story is interesting. It's a rewarding experience, if you're determined enough to play it.

Your shout: 70%



Gothic 3: bugged to oblivion?

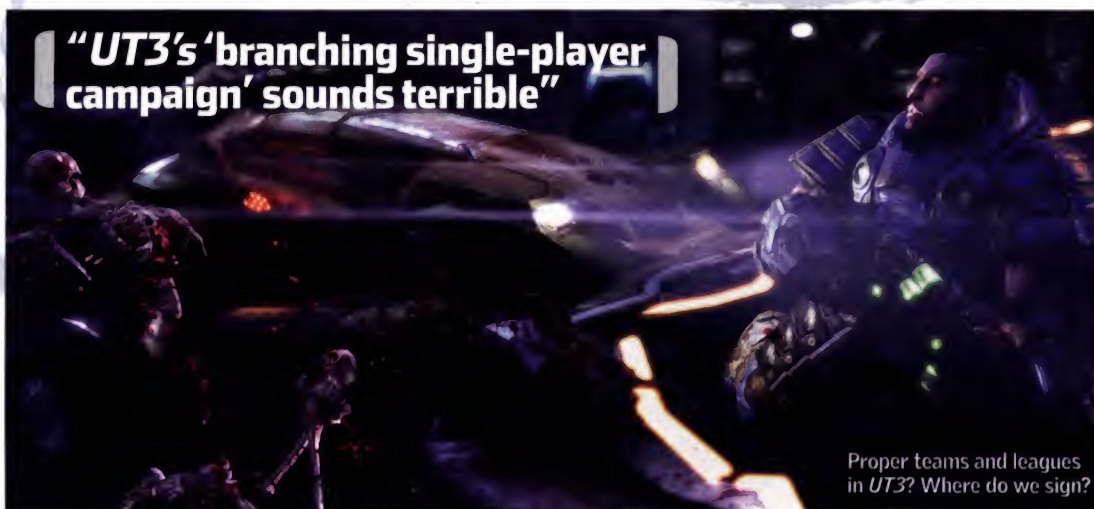
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Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

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"UT3's 'branching single-player campaign' sounds terrible"



Proper teams and leagues in UT3? Where do we sign?

FAN FRACTION

Over the years, I've been surprised many times by your mag, from the sight of a fully-grown man eating his own backside, to the emergence of such impressively widespread transvestism. But, with this latest issue, I all but wept with joy as I found an article on, of all things, fanfiction! Being an individual afflicted with said preoccupation, I can honestly say that seeing it written about for more than a few scant lines was a real pleasure. I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling that we would-be authors of variable literary merit will go on tapping at our keyboards with lighter hearts knowing that, no matter what strangenesses we unleash on to the Internet, our efforts have been (somewhat) vindicated.

David 'Nutzoide' King

Just as you're glad to find us covering your defiantly strange pastime, I too am glad that you've noticed my undying ambition to be dressed as a woman by my cruel workmates AS MANY TIMES AS I POSSIBLY CAN. It's probably just a phase...

THE UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

I was reading the *Unreal Tournament 3* article in issue 179 and found myself in full agreement that the single-player aspect of the series has always been a massive disappointment. However, am I the only one who thinks this new 'branching single-player campaign' sounds terrible? *Unreal Tournament* was always supposed to portray some kind of sport, so why are they trying to prise a narrative into a game totally unsuitable for a story? There are already loads of decent story-driven FPSs on the market and NONE of them consists of a big sequence of deathmatches and capture-the-flag battles. What I want as a single-player game is a proper career mode that can be played indefinitely. I want different leagues and circuits, a massive character roster and a decent team-management and transfer system. It doesn't have to be *Football Manager 2007* or anything, just something more imaginative than playing 'instant action' for the rest of my life.

Matt Taylor

Crikey – you're not wrong Matt. A 'Speedball 2' league format for *Unreal Tournament 3* would work both offline and on – but this certainly isn't the way developers Epic are headed. To be brutally honest though, the concept of alien invasions and warring sci-fi corporations is much more instantly saleable to the mass-market, and that's probably why Epic are trotting down that particular route (Mark Rein has a family to feed and all that). I have faith that the story will work, and work well, but I'd love to see your motion put into action. Any mod-makers listening?

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

Oddly enough, operating systems were the last thing on my mind as I read *PC ZONE's* Windows Vista feature (issue 179) – it was that tiny photo of Log that sparked my imagination. Am I alone in thinking he looks pretty blimmin' similar to Jayne Cobb (Adam Baldwin) from the short-lived *Firefly* TV series? Anyone?

Michael 'Haanz' Hanns

Yes. Well-spotted Michael – there is an uncanny (nay, chilling) resemblance between Jayne from *Firefly/Serenity* and our own Jon 'Log' Blyth. Log would also like it made very clear that he is just like a rough, tough, battle-scarred cowboy from space. And don't we love him for it? **PCZ**

WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?

PEGGLE

Steam/PopCap

Bagatelle-inspired bouncing-ball game starring a beautiful unicorn that cries when you attempt to log out. A guilty pleasure in gaming if ever there was one...

DEUS EX

Sold Out budget release

Fevered re-playing and comedic 'I wanted lemon-lime!' mugging accompanied this month's crowning of *Deus Ex* as PCZ's greatest ever PC game. Hooray for JC.

WORLD IN CONFLICT

VU Games

Becoming a force to be reckoned with in both solo and multiplayer. Definitely a big name come the end of the year.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?



THIS MONTH: SPUDY2000 (AKA PAUL HOEY)

CORTEX COMMAND

www.datarealms.com

I found this real-time worms thing in PCZ and love it. Always fun, especially with the community-made mods. Crashing spaceships never gets boring.

STALKER

THQ

I got this on release day as I was really looking forward to it. None too chuffed by the lack of polish, but certainly worth the purchase.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

VU Games

On my hard drive since October, and I don't see it leaving any time soon. Brilliant game whether I want to take things easy, or grind to level 70.

Want to tell us what's on your hard drive? Email the PCZ team at news@pczone.co.uk and we'll tell you.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



Jayne Cobb.



Jon 'Log' Blyth.

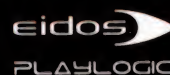
A·N·C·I·E·N·T W·A·R·S SPARTA



⌘ FIGHT · CONQUER · REIGN SUPREME ⌘



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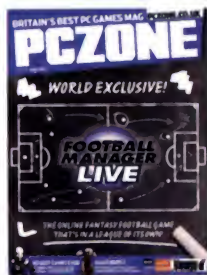




COVER STORY

FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

It's all kicking off... Sports Interactive reveal their brand-new
Football Manager game exclusively to PC ZONE. We are the champions...



WE'VE BEEN LOYAL supporters of the Collyer brothers' *Football Manager* games as long as Alex Ferguson has had run-ins with referees. So, when Sports Interactive said they had a revolutionary new game on the bench, we made it our goal to be the first magazine in the world to break the story. *Football Manager Live* is a mix of classic *Football Manager*, eBay, MSN Messenger and Fantasy Football – a more accessible, pick-up-and-play massively multiplayer version of *FM07*. Now that we've played it, we're also giving you the chance to become one of only a few dozen playtesters for *FML*, with 25 Beta keys up for grabs. It really is a whole new ball game...

PAGE
42



PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

SOCCER KID

WHEN I WAS a kid, I used to do a play-by-mail football management game. Every week with a cheque for £1.50, I'd send off almost illegible scrawls of basic tactics, vicious rebuffs to the advances made by other sheepskin-coat-wearing 11-year-olds and fresh ideas to finance the ailing postal side that was Bedford United. I believe at one point I was trying to encourage circuses to occupy the centre circle of the pitch on non match-days. It sounds weird, but it was nothing compared to the oddness of my mum having to answer the phone to pre-adolescents putting on deep voices and demanding to speak to 'the manager of Bedford United', fully prepared to play hard ball.

This, of course, was long pre-Internet and I've been waiting for something similar to properly appear in gaming for years and years. So now it's my very great pleasure to present you with *Football Manager Live* – the new plaything to appear from the ever-hallowed halls of Sports Interactive. And, let me tell you, with current *ZONE* footy fandom covering such stunning outfits as QPR, Leeds and Southend, the idea of being able to follow the weekly exploits of a team who might actually win every now and then is positively wondrous.

Anyway, enough bleating. I just haven't been this excited about a non-shooting-related PC game in aeons. The fabled Bedford Utd cup run of the 91-92 season shall be seen once more! It's a funny old game! They think it's all over! Etc! Etc!

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

IS WINDOWS LIVE WORTH IT?

The Microsoft platform merger continues apace. Should you give a monkeys?



WE'VE BEEN DOUBTFUL about

Microsoft's stance on PC gaming in the past. "A cynical Brit! Who'd have thought it?" laughs Rich Wickham, director of

Games For Windows, as *ZONE* quizzes him on his global plans. So is it all true, or simply a smokescreen to promote Vista? "Twelve months from now, and we're not doing this, then call me up! Twelve months from now and we are doing it, then give us some credit for the dedication," Wickham declares.

Alongside DX10, shiny new boxes and an entirely reinvigorated GFW brand, a primary thrust of Microsoft's refreshed

foray into their home platform is the extension of the Xbox LIVE system into our fair waters.

"We're not just taking the Xbox LIVE Gold model, stamping it on the PC space and saying 'deal with it'," underlines Wickham. "We could have conceivably done that, it would have been a lot easier to be perfectly honest. But we looked very carefully at the marketplace – what was available and what was free. And if you're being fair and looking at what's free, it's not great."

And so the Windows prong of LIVE will come in two shiny hues: gold and silver, the latter free and the former requesting you stump up £39.99 a year. The free version will grant you a package that'll provide text chat, voice chat, friends lists and a server-browsing functionality – alongside the gamertags, gamer scores and single-player achievements



Rumour has it you'll be able to play as the Covenant!



LIVE will be tied to Vista, so XP owners will go without...

so mysteriously beloved by the 360 fraternity.

But why would a *ZONE* reader want to sign up even for the free version when we can do all this stuff already Mr Wickham? "Your readers are familiar with this, they're technically savvy – they can figure out how to make all these things happen," smiles the man from MS. "But I think if they're being honest, they'd rather not have to configure the key features, log onto Xfire, go in and out of game with Xfire and everything else..."

Well, arguably true – but what'll convince PC gamers to stump up hard cash every year for the gold star service? First, there's TrueSkill matchmaking to ensure you find yourself on a server with players who're at the same level of 133tiness as yourself, achievements garnered in multiplayer and that oft-touted ability to play 360 gamers sitting slack-jawed on their sofas. This final feature being something previously scoffed at in these hallowed pages yet, as Wickham assures, a desirable feature for those who've never been able to play with their console-favouring friends.

STOP PRESS!

NEED COMPANY?

Further adventure for the acclaimed *Company Of Heroes* gang is now a dead-cert. Expect a massive feature from our next issue...

ICE CREAM!

Speedball 2 release confirmed for summer. Ranking, international leagues, a marketplace to buy and sell in... The Amiga is finally dead!

HEY HEY GTA

GTA IV is set in Liberty City (looking far more 'New Yoik' than ever before), and seems to have you controlling a Russian gangster.

20 Left 4 Dead

Valve reckons this is bigger than *Counter-Strike*. Intrigued? You should be...



28 Guild Wars 2

ArenaNet finds that persistence is worthwhile with their hugely ambitious sequel.



42 Football Manager Live

Armchair managers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your temper...

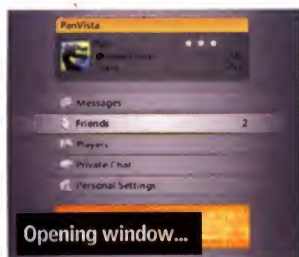


With LIVE's flagship games being the now ageing *Halo 2* and the still ominous *Shadowrun*, it's perhaps important to remember that Microsoft are assuredly in this for the long haul. With little need for provocation, Wickham hints strongly at game-patching services, an Xbox LIVE Arcade-style set-up for Windows and even the potential of games that have PC users as RTS tacticians, while 360 players run around on the FPS battlefield below.

We went into our meeting with the man from Microsoft as dyed-in-the-wool cynics, but came out with somewhat softened expressions. As for just how many people are going to sign up for the full-fat version of Windows LIVE though... Well, time will tell.



Shadowrun: jury still out.

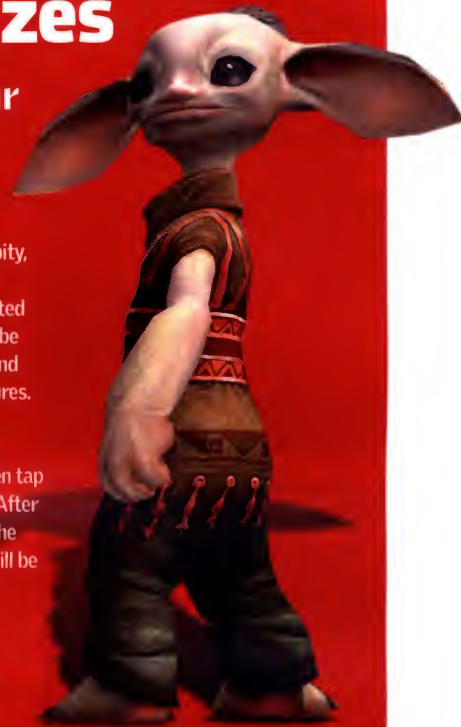


Pets = prizes

How to unlock your free *Guild Wars* Asura mini-pet...

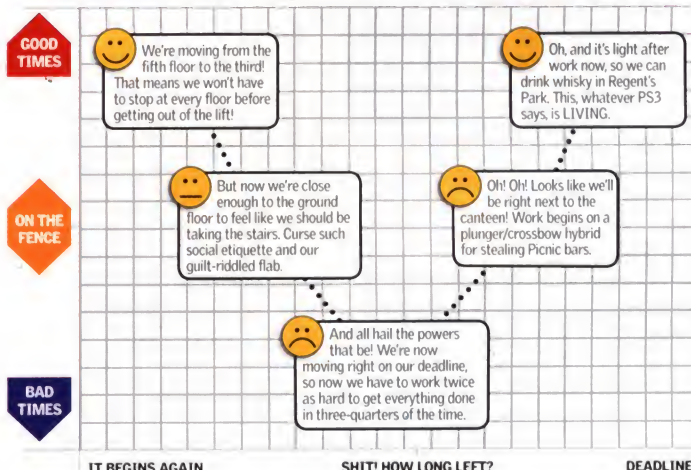
THE ASURA ARE the cute, if rather uppity, big-eared chaps due to hit the lands of Tyria – and with the code securely printed on the back of this month's DVD, you'll be able to unlock one of them to trail around behind you on your *Guild Wars* adventures. But how, we hear you cry?

At the *Guild Wars* login screen, click 'Create account or enter access key', then tap your magic code into the box provided. After that, when in-game type '/special' into the Chat panel and a freshly created item will be waiting for retrieval in your character's inventory. There's only one Asura per character on each *Guild Wars* account though, so use him/her/whatever well! Any problems, visit <http://uk.support.guildwars.com>



STUFF If you fancy doing the mash, the co-operative monster mash – and let's face it, you'd be mad not to – then upcoming top-down shooter *Monster Madness* is shaping up to recall those heady days of *Chaos Engine* and *Alien Breed* – albeit with a slice of *Serious Sam*-inanity placed delicately on top. Colourful, fast-paced, vehicle-enhanced – but potentially more of a 360 title than PC. Review soon.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



BANNED IN GERMANY

Don't mention the war, but Deutschland decision-makers are on the verge of butchering all violent videogames...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

COBURG, BAVARIA, 2004. The Crytek team were trickling into work in the early hours of the morning when state troopers kicked down the door. The studio had recently completed development on *Far Cry*, but the polizei (armed with Heckler & Koch sub-machine guns) weren't exactly here to play Capture The Flag. At a nearby Crytek residence, a programmer emerged from the shower to find armed troopers in his room. He was ordered to lay on the floor, naked, a gun to his head.

Developer Tim Partlett, who vented his frustration about the event in an online forum, was herded into the studio's Mo-Cap offices by dozens of armed guards and questioned under the kind of military threat that would make Jack Carver shit his pants. Supposedly, this heavy-handedness was in response to an allegation by a former employee that Crytek had installed illegal software. In reality, authorities in Germany just don't like the games industry very much.

The controversy over 'killerspiele' (killer games) is now heating up to fever-pitch proportions in Germany. Politicians are calling for the prohibition of violent shooters like *Quake* and *UT*, while the media are behaving in a manner that makes the *Daily Mail* look like a model of reason.

"GTA: *San Andreas* – whoever rapes the most women wins," ranted a recent edition of German *Panorama*, as the

Hot Coffee mod was displayed to the tune of Nirvana's *Rape Me*.

DAS IST NOT GUT

This probably isn't a great time to be a game developer in Deutschland. However, Ralf Marcinczik, art director behind the *Gothic* series at Piranha Bytes (based in Bochum, Germany) is willing to spill the beans.

"It's a safe bet for politicians to beat down on questionable content in order to get free media time and heighten their profile. Most discussions present out-of-context images of shooters without providing details about rating information. Laws are now being drafted and petitioned that demand stronger regulation and, in some cases, to outlaw the production of shooter games."

Germany has always had its spoilsports. Back in the 1980s, human baddies in the *Contra* series were replaced with robots, while pixellated gore was removed from *Rambo III*. In 1997, authorities demanded that the peds/zombies in *Carmageddon* be replaced with robots, and in 2002, *Soldier Of Fortune II*'s baddies were turned into cyborgs. Happy moral crusaders means unhappy mechanically-automated beings.

Gears Of War was stripped of an official release in Germany and EA were recently seen to remove Nod suicide bombers from *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars*. And it's not only wanton violence that gets the censors' heckles up. "*Gothic* received attention when over-eager newspaper journalists put us in their articles without checking our games first," says Ralf Marcinczik. "It's laughable to compare us to games like *Wolfenstein* just because we put castles in the background."

NO TO NAZIS

Ah, *Wolfenstein* – the key to this entire hullabaloo. You see, after the horror of WWII, the German state strived to become aggressively pacifist – avoiding violent entertainment at all cost. Fascism is a blight on this country's history and anything that appears to exploit those dark days is banished.

Marcinczik continues: "The media are more alert when it comes to images of simulated war and military situations." Thus *Wolfenstein 3D* was banned, and all offending Nazi imagery was removed from other war-themed games like *COD* and *MOH*. But why just games and not movies? Does an





in-game swastika automatically promote Aryan supremacy?

Although morally dubious entertainment has been around since Oedipus shagged his ma, or Hamlet stabbed his mates, or Punch murdered Judy's child, gamers are social pariahs in Germany. This country is the world's third biggest games market, home to 40,000 online gaming teams, selling €1.7bn worth of games every year, and host to Europe's largest gaming trade show (the Games Convention in Leipzig). Yet still, the media and politicians crap on their own doorstep.

NOT GODSPELL

Last year, Scottish machinima-makers Strange Company experienced the country's paranoia over violent games first-hand. "We were about to screen our film *BloodSpell* at Leipzig," recalls StrangeCo founder Hugh Hancock. "However, two weeks before the event another media scare blew up. The

Conference was running scared because the media had it in for them, and they felt they couldn't show *BloodSpell* unless we censored it. We refused to turn up. The Conference guys were fantastic – they tried their best in an impossible situation. If I had the German equivalent of the *Daily Mail* breathing down my neck, I might have made the same call."

When asked for a chinwag, Stephan Reiss, press officer for the Leipzig Games Con, responded: "We cannot comment on violent videogames in Germany." Bad timing. On November 20, 2006, 18-year-old Sebastian Bosse loaded up on guns and entered a high school in Emsdetten, Germany. He injured 37 and killed himself with a shot to the head.

When police revealed that Bosse liked playing *Counter-Strike* (glazing over the fact that he was bullied at school and worshipped the Columbine killers), politicians went killerspiele-crazy. The states of Bavaria and Lower Saxony drafted legislation that, if approved,

Gaming in Crysis

Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli on the Deutschland dilemma



"I said, put down your gun, soldier."



What's the current relationship between games and government in Germany?

"There's a lot of nonsense going on there: they have a term, 'killer game'. In Germany, that means that it's brutal, it's inhumane – that kind of vibe. The problem is that those in power are going so far that they want to disallow their development – and if it becomes forbidden, and the games we do are considered killer games, then we're moving out! That category itself is very difficult to get to, but if one of our games was forbidden, then we'd leave the country."

It does sound pretty extreme...

"The thing is that right now, according to a drafted law, killer games are considered as bad as child pornography. That said though, we now have dialogue with a lot of politicians and parties to educate them more about this, so things are a bit calmer right now..."

It's strange, since bar occasional media flair-ups, games development is quite well supported in the UK.

"Yes – you'd assume we'd get support from our country, but all we get is trouble!"

So have Crytek games ever been limited by all this?

"Sort of – but I didn't care. They can talk, but we'll still make our own game.

We won't change direction whatsoever, because we're not doing it for them at all. I want to do what I want to do with Crytek."

would imprison anyone caught developing, distributing or playing violent games. "Killer games desensitise unstable characters to violence," Bavaria's interior minister, Günther Beckstein, told the press.

STAND BY YOUR MAN

Unfortunately, the controversy comes at a time when Germany holds the reins of the EU presidency. Germany's justice minister Brigitte Zypries recently opened the debate by showing European decision-makers a two-minute clip of *Manhunt*. Uh-oh. "A certain degree of linkage between the growing violence among the younger generation and the growing diffusion of violent games exists," said Franco Frattini, the European Justice commissioner.

So the killerspiele panic has seeped across German borders, leaving all sense

of reason and sanity in its wake. "I think we'll have the same discussion every time some confused young adult gets a gun and decides to take it with him to school," laments Ralf Marczinczik. Unfortunately, there are no simple causes to random acts of real-life violence: not Marilyn Manson, not Quentin Tarantino, and certainly not videogames.

And on that point, where better to finish than with some indiscriminate sadism: "The woman took her little boy and chopped him into pieces, put him into the pot and made him into stew. Then the father came home. 'But where is my son?' he asked. His wife said nothing and served up a great dish from the pot of stew." A scenario from the latest game-gore sick-fest? No, it's by Germany's own Brothers Grimm, whose fantastic fairytales have been terrifying kids since 1807. 'Nuff said. **PCZ**

"We'll have the same discussion every time some confused young adult gets a gun and decides to take it to school"

Ralf Marczinczik, Piranha Bytes, German developer



Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

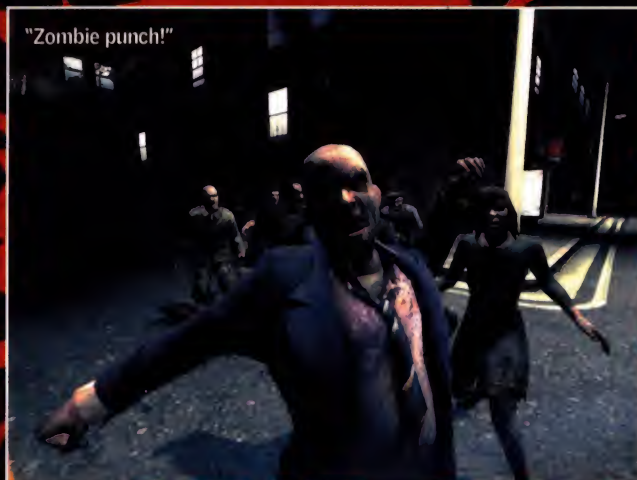
Her name is Zoey, and if you don't run up to her and press 'F', she'll fall.



Gangster zombies: one of the worst kinds.



"Zombie punch!"



LEFT 4 DEAD

Steve Hogarty goes deep in zombie viscera to sample Valve's terrifying co-op shooter

DEVELOPER Turtle Rock Studios PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE www.l4d.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

Top-class zombies	✓
Proper co-op gameplay	✓
New campaigns through Steam	✓
AI Director keeps things fresh	✓
Will it work in the long-term?	✗
Not much depth	✗

YOU'VE GOT TO raise at least one eyebrow when Valve's buddies at Turtle Rock Studios claim that with *Left 4 Dead*, they're out to beat *Counter-Strike* – but that's exactly what they're planning on doing. They're adamant that with their four-way zombie co-op survival horror extravaganza they can supersede the most widely played online shooter on the planet, and having flown to Valve, taken part in the undead slaughter and relished the sort of interdependent gameplay so rarely seen in PC games, I can say that Turtle Rock Studios have a good chance of doing just that.

With one foot on the back of Valve's tried-and-tested Source engine, and another on the head of Mike Booth, master bot AI designer who earned his stripes developing *Counter-Strike*'s dead-eyed CPU foes, Turtle Rock are peeking over the wall of potential, and into the garden of wondrous, original co-op fun. *Left 4 Dead* is what they see.

ROLL CALL

I take my place in front of the playtesting PC with Valve writer (and Old Man Murray alumnus) Chet Faliszek by my side, as one of *Left 4 Dead*'s four campaigns is loaded and players from throughout Valve's

Bellevue offices begin to fill the server. I am one of the four human survivors, a John Everyman business type who's found himself in the middle of a zombie virus outbreak without even a suit for comfort. To my left and right, stocking up on guns and ammo from a handy weapons cache on the rooftop we've started on, are the other survivors. There's a big biker-looking chap, a war veteran probably secretly loving the opportunity to shoot things, and a 'pick me to make people want to give you their med-packs' pretty rich girl who, at odds with her appearance, knows how to blast holes in zombie torsos. In practice, of course, they're all just different player models and voice-samples. The only real choice is in what you grab from the table of weapons.

To make a total player count of eight, four other players have spawned as four special zombies who live happily among the ravenous hordes. The Boomer, a fat flesh-balloon filled with explosive gases and zombie-attracting vomit. The Hunter, a quick and agile zombie who jumps out of dark corners. The Smoker, with his 50-foot prehensile tongue. And The Hulk, who is not unlike his greener

namesake. As the survivors make their way through the level, it's these infected players who must stop them with their particular zombie powers. Helpfully, they've got infinite lives, so they won't be worried about being a tad gung-ho.

ALL OUTTA GUM

The weapons on offer aren't terribly interesting. I grab a pistol and a shotgun, rationalising that shotguns are always the best choice where zombies are concerned. A grenade slips into my inventory, and I forego the submachine gun and the molotovs. You could describe the available weapons as either mundane or classic, depending on your outlook, but they won't be the reason people play *Left 4 Dead*. The game is about co-operative teamplay – and not the sort of teamplay you find in *Battlefield* where it'd barely be noticed if you logged off to eat some bourbon biscuits, but the kind of teamplay in which everything you do directly affects your three compadres. It's precisely because the team is so small that this dependency on teamwork exists, and on every level of gameplay you're encouraged to help each other out.

ETA
AUTUMN

THE STORY SO FAR...

TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS

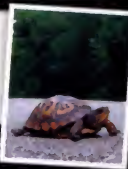
Crazy Kids
A bunch of young folks create a mod for *Half-Life* called *Counter-Strike*.

2000



Forsooth, Booth
Michael Booth forms indie company Turtle Rock Studios.

2002



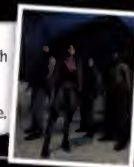
Bot a lot
Turtle Rock use their AI skills to create the official *Counter-Strike* bot.

2004



Left 4 Dead
Still in cohorts with Valve, Turtle Rock begin work on a co-op zombie game.

2006



Phew, the police are here.



It's not the sort of teamplay you find in *Battlefield* where it'd barely be noticed if you logged off to eat some biscuits

Generously, my team-mates allow me to take the lead, as we make our way down through the apartment building. It's not long before I have my first encounter with the infected. The AI-controlled undead on show here are staggeringly well animated. They spill out of doorways in their droves, at times at least 20 of them on screen at once. They sprint down streets towards you at high speed, climbing over burnt-out cars, leaning into corners as they run – there's something terrifyingly purposeful about how they come at you.

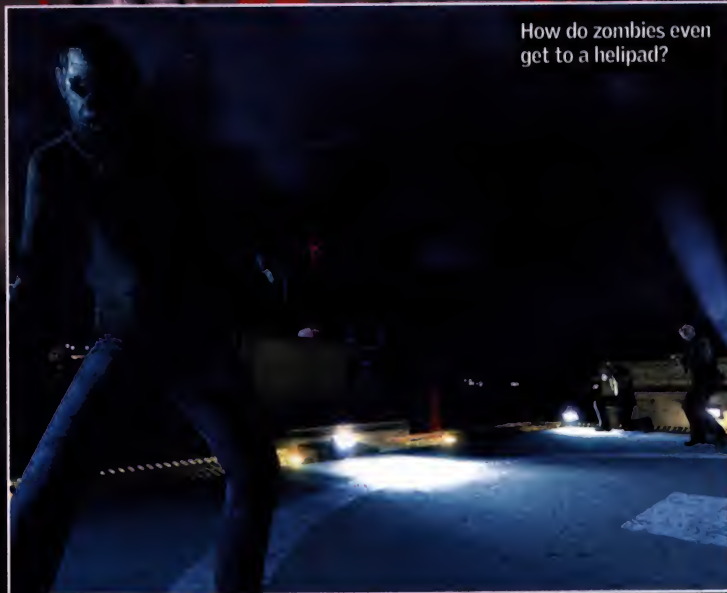
When shot, they stumble to the ground mid-sprint, their faltering a mix of animation and physics, Faliszek informs me. Oh yes, these are good zombies, these are running zombies from *28 Days Later* (count how many times this



Cheer up, it's zombies!



Fall down and you can still shoot from the floor.



How do zombies even get to a helipad?

Which witch? Where?

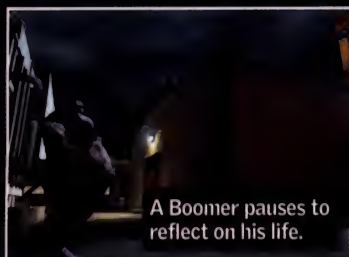
For the love of god don't piss off the Witch...



Take some Anadin, love.

Besides the four playable infected characters, there's a fifth unplayable type called the Witch. She's unplayable because to play as her would simply be boring, but she's far from a boring character. The Witch crouches in a corner, having a jolly old time by sobbing to herself in the creepiest way possible. She'll react to light and sound by completely flipping the hell out and tearing people to shreds, which is why the sight of her prompts a hushed exclamation of, "Witch! Flashlights off," from my pals, before everybody silently tiptoes around the psychotic lady.

It's easily the most tense moment in the game, and a perfect time for the remaining four infected to launch a surprise attack, forcing somebody to fire a gun and aggravate the Witch. Then shit gets real f***ed up, as the kids would probably say.



A Boomer pauses to reflect on his life.

game will get associated with that movie), and they feel great to kill.

SMOKING KILLS

A few dozen undead corpses in and we come across the first of the four player-controlled infected. In *Left 4 Dead*, the four humans appear through walls as yellow silhouettes when not directly visible, meaning team-mates can always tell where the rest of their team is, even from rooms away. It also means the infected players can ambush the humans simply by waiting around corners.

In this situation, the Smoker has been waiting for us, perched at the edge of a hole in the floor above, looking down into the room we're about to enter. The first clue that there's a Smoker nearby is, well, the *smoke*. It fills rooms and makes it difficult to notice a long black tongue snake downwards and wrap around your team-mate's neck before lifting him 4ft off the floor. Once he's trapped in the fleshy noose, he'll uselessly dangle there like a frequently parodied ex-dictator,

with only a few precious seconds of life left. It takes the quick-thinking trigger finger of another team-mate to persuade the Smoker to let go. Score one point for the survivors.

These are the times when the game comes into its own. Whether they're trapped under a Hunter, lying wounded on the floor or just perilously clinging to a ledge after being punched out of a window by a Hulk, saving a team-mate is a brilliant feeling, and it creates countless unscripted moments of fear (and subsequent relief). Small touches like the ability to lock doors as well as shoot holes in them add some spice to the proceedings, while the so-called AI Director works silently in the background to orchestrate the flow of zombie hordes.

INFECTED

What this means is that sometimes you'll be tentatively making your way down a deserted alleyway, while other times you'll be overrun by enemies. Play through the same section a second time and the locations and strengths of each wave of brain-hungry foes will be different. It keeps you on edge, and when playing as one of the infected four you'll be waiting for the humans to be defending themselves from the AI before you attack.



The only good undead is a dead undead.



New particle effects allow for nice blood splatters.



A second pistol can be found for akimbo action.

Actually taking control of the infected turns *Left 4 Dead* into a means of seemingly trying to ruin somebody else's fun. What we played was still a little rough, but the basics are sound. As a Boomer you hide around corners before leaping into the middle of the survivors and belching your juices on them. As a Hunter you wait until you hear somebody reporting the fact that they're reloading before pouncing on

A fate better than death

Crystal Maze-style lock-ins for dead team-mates



Who ate all the brains?

The difficulty levels are still being tweaked, but *Left 4 Dead*'s 'Normal' setting is likely to allow each human player to die three times before they're completely out of the game. Higher difficulty settings will no doubt see one death spelling the end of your fun, but when respawning is an option, the game handles it in a clever way.

Naturally, you get thrown into a spectator view when dead, but your body gets transported to a locked room further on in the level (it might sound improbable, but hey, so are snake-tongued zombies). After this, it's up to your friends to spring you from your purgatory, risking their own lives to regain that vital extra member of the team. It's a bit like the Crystal Maze in that sense, only your team-mates won't have to cough up any crystals.

The smoke makes it difficult to notice a long black tongue snake down and wrap around your team-mate's neck

them and eating their head. As a Smoker you lock on to humans before launching your tongue at them, and as the Hulk you chuck cars and debris about like lego. It's simple, brutal, and in essence quite easy.

Our campaign had us heading for a rooftop helipad across the city, from which we were to radio for a helicopter. *Left 4 Dead* will ship with four campaigns (with extra campaigns planned for release at a later stage), some of which will take place in rural areas as well as the typical urban settings. Broken into five separate maps, the campaign I was playing took about 40 minutes to beat. Could that be too much of a time commitment for random online co-op?

It remains to be seen how the ducks will take to this particular water, and whether this will be played more by groups of friends than random strangers, but *Left 4 Dead* has enough to keep most players captivated for a full campaign. In between maps you're presented with a scoreboard listing your achievements in that round, as well as your failures. Handing over a health pack to a needier player earns an achievement, as do

things like rescuing a team-mate and exploding a Boomer at a time when it didn't harm anybody. Meanwhile, deliberate pot-shots at friends and selfish use of resources puts a big embarrassing mark next to your name. Serves you right too.

PUDDING

So while this isn't immediately similar to any iteration of *Counter-Strike*, it's apparent that inside its decaying veins flows the same congealing blood. The sort of blood that contains a careful measure of teamplay and fun. Yes, *Counter-Strike* and *Left 4 Dead* might be distant cousins – and the latter might also be the kick in the arse *Counter-Strike* players need to stop playing the increasingly stale but defiantly popular shooter, and start playing something infinitely more interesting.

Don't colour us convinced just yet however, as *Left 4 Dead*'s proof will be found nowhere else but in the online pudding. Minimally multiplayer online gaming might just be the way forward. **PCZ**

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THE MAN WHO KNOWS



When we're **online**, we may put on the **masks of the beautiful**, the **muscly** and the **cleavage-enhanced** – but we still bring ourselves along too. That's the message from PhD candidate **Nick Yee** over at Stanford University in the States. Among reams of odd information gathered by his survey of **40,000 MMO gamers**, Yee discovered that women playing **Second-Life** were far more likely to maintain virtual eye-contact with **other women**, while the eyes of men tend to **wander around the place** – not least, presumably, on attractive virtual women nattering on the other side of the street. On average, meanwhile, stand-offish blokes have online conversations with their avatars standing an average of **7.7 gruff and manly feet** away from each other while discussing the usual bullshit you find in **Second Life**, while more intimate pairings of men and women stand a mere **6.9 feet apart**. The fact that most **Second Lifers** have **restraining orders** attached to them banning such proximity in the real world does not seem to have been addressed in the research. In other news, the **proliferation of shit mobile games** coded in enforced **labour camps** of recent years has created an unlikely resurgence, a gaming phenomenon long-since erased by tireless QA teams around the globe: crap Asian to English translations! As heralded by **nifty handheld website** www.pocketgamer.co.uk, daft thesaurus-created translations are appearing on Nokia handsets near you. "Embark upon a path of carnage and turn giant creatures and advanced weapons into worthless rescue teams!" screams **UFO Predator**, an "augmented-reality ego-shooter... In which no-one can sit still!" runs the press blurb for **Mosquito**; "One night when being fast asleep Giana from Milano has a strange dream. All of a sudden, she is located in a mysterious world where all things happen to be unordinary!" screams the **Giana Sisters** adventure. Oh, for a return of those **wonderful days** when all your bases truly were belong to us...

"Women playing Second Life were far more likely to maintain virtual eye contact with other women"



SHADOW OF THE BEAST



Sacred 2: Fallen Angel continues the assault on the most long-held crown in gaming...

www.sacred2.com | ETA: 2008

WE'VE GONE YEARS without a successor to *Diablo II* – perhaps the MMO-boom put a dampener on the need to wander through caves with swords of increasing girth, facing monsters of increasing size and fangs. Whatever, in the run up to what will be the announcement of *Diablo III*, prime examples of hackage and slashage are oozing out of the fantastical woodwork and sitting obstinately on the horizon. Their names are legion, and some not a little rubbish, but chief among them in probable worth and certainly graphical goodness is *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel*.

"I'm not sure that action RPGs have ever really been away," counters Alan Wild of Ascaron. "There have been a number of releases over the years, and plenty of contenders have tried (and failed) to come close to reaching the rewards of a certain benchmark title for many years now..."

The accessible freeform nature of *Sacred* combined with a few lovably innovative character classes (Vampiresses, Gladiators and Seraphims rather than rogues, monks and assassins) made for a crazy, addictive and surprisingly successful formula.

BRINGING SEXY BACK

Now it's all coming back, but with that same drive for originality in tow – to the extent that only the sexy wings of the Seraphim will be making a return from the first game – ably assisted by a cast of five: Shadow Warrior, Inquisitor, High Elf, Dryad and Temple Guardian. As your chosen warrior, you'll then stride across the map following quests, over scripted hill and through randomly generated dungeon in traditional style.

Alongside your character's own background and motives, there'll also be the equivalent of a morality-



driven swanee-whistle quavering in pitch backstage – if you do bad stuff then evil quests will open themselves up to you, and vice versa if you wear a permanent halo.

"Monsters will remain monsters, but the NPC cities will be anxious or even hostile towards the player," explains Ward on Ascaron's newfound BioWare stylings. "The shadow campaign will run parallel to the good campaign, but from a different perspective: protagonist and antagonist will be reversed."

Sacred 2 takes place a good couple of thousand years before its former incarnation's monster mash, and its story of elvish civil war is set around a typically obtuse concept known as T-energy – something that will undoubtedly show its power through pretty lighting effects.

Better the devil you know?

Other games vying for *Diabolic* glory...



Loki

A bit like *Titan Quest*, in that it takes a run through Egyptian, Norse and Aztec mythologies as well as that of the Greeks. Randomly generated, starring all your favourite ancestral heroes (be they dog-headed or wielders of lightning), and from the makers of *Chaos League* and *Pro Cycling Manager*. Yay!



Numen

With action closer to *WOW* than something like *Titan Quest*, *Numen* yet again ploughs the furrow of an ancient Olympian tasked by a deity to click on multiple enemies repeatedly until they're dead. Not the best graphically, plus the name sounds like something you'd be prescribed rather than want to play...



Mythos

A *Diablo*-lite casual creation from Flagship, the guys similarly tasked with bringing the grime of *Hellgate: London* to your screen. Largely an online beast, its relatively cutesy-pie looks indicate that it's aimed at the young and the infirm, but being both free to download and play should attract floating voters.



Hellgate: London

It needs no introduction, but despite the glaring difference in style, *Hellgate* is built with the same mentality as *Diablo*, and by one of its primary creators. Set in the randomly generated streets of a ruined London, *Hellgate* has online modes to die for. Only problem is that the release date is on continually shaky ground.

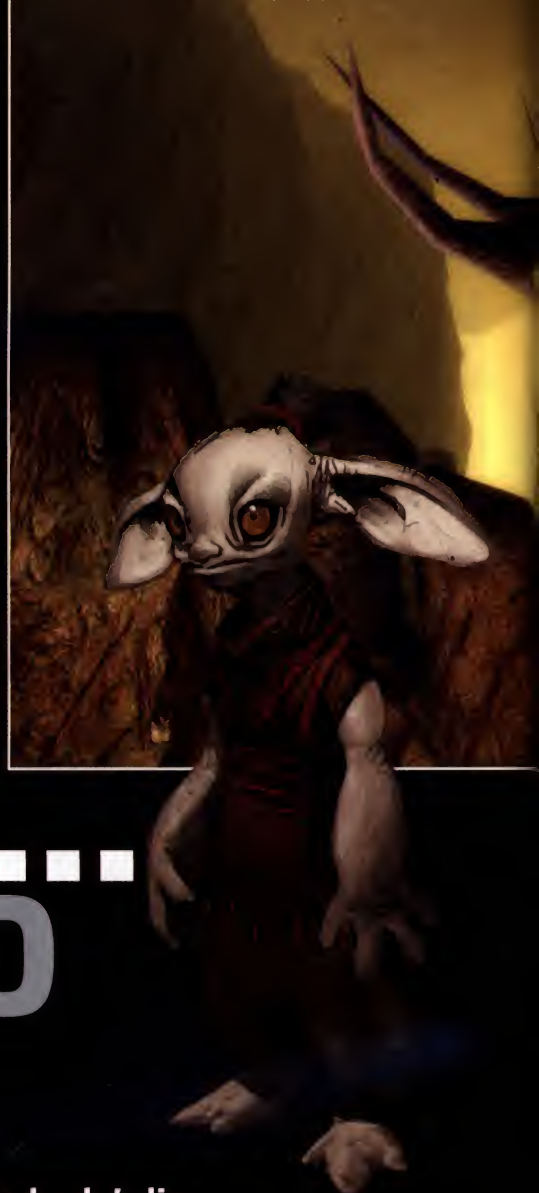


With two-thirds of the play area open to you from its very start, and a play area you could sprint over in a good number of hours (presumably less when you get your character-specific mount to add some sparkle to your travel – *Shadow Warriors* get Hell Hounds for example), *Sacred II: Fallen Angel* wears sufficiently different shades of bloody red to its rivals bobbing on the horizon. Big question is – will *Diablo III* appear in the meantime? Quite cruelly, we hope so – but fans of the swipe-n-slay adventure will certainly get a more than proficient outing in smitage come its release.

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT GUILD WARS 2... BUT WERE TOO NOOB TO ASK

Suzy Wallace and Will Porter answer the questions on everybody's lips...

DEVELOPER ArenaNet PUBLISHER NCsoft WEBSITE www.guildwars.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 180



What exactly is an 'Eye of the North'?

The Eye Of The North is the name of the high-level expansion pack that's going to finish off the *Guild Wars* trilogy with a bang this autumn, while neatly dovetailing with the storyline and characters of the forthcoming *Guild Wars 2*. As for what the Eye of the North is – well, that's something players will have to find out. It's all connected to growing unrest in the bits to the north of the lands of Ascalon – the area experienced *Guild Wars*-ers will already know and love from *Guild Wars: Prophecies* – the first notch on ArenaNet's Tyrian bedpost.

What itinerant godly problem is Tyria suffering from now?

It's all to do with the dwarves. "This is a dungeon exploration expansion," smiles ArenaNet co-founder Jeff Strain. "The above-ground areas will be familiar as there's a strong return-to-Ascalon theme, but after you've spent some time above ground and got the lay of the land (returning to the places you've

known and loved for a long time), then we take you underground into the dungeons and caverns below Ascalon and below the Shiverpeak mountains."

Earthquakes have ripped through all the *Guild Wars* lands you see, and dark fissures have opened. Players will discover an underground land where the dwarves are at war with an ancient enemy who are aptly known as 'Destroyers'. The leader of whom, the even more aptly titled Great Destroyer, is laying the fiery smackdown on all their big-eyed and short-of-stature neighbour races.

How will *Guild Wars 133t*ness in *Eye Of The North* be transferred into *Guild Wars 2*?

"We have players in *GW* who've played the game in excess of 2,000 hours," explains Jeff Strain with assured gravitas. "They've made a substantial investment in *Guild Wars* and we want to reward that investment. So, while you can't just take your character and import it directly into *Guild Wars 2*, we'd like you to be able



The Destroyers are causing a ruck in the *Eye Of The North* expansion.



Achievements are kept on display in your Hall Of Monuments.

to bring over everything that makes your character special."

So, not only will your existing character name be reserved, but through *Eye Of The North*, your various successes and achievements will be filtered through the magic of time and appear as inheritance in *Guild Wars 2* – as weapons, companions, mini-pets and clothing. Awards will also be displayed in your own Hall of Monuments in the expansion.

When pressed though, ArenaNet point out that it's not a 'real' inheritance – if you were really set to play as your great, great-grandchild in *GW2* and had chosen to play as an Asura, then someone along the line would presumably had to have mistakenly gotten a small faerie-creature up the duff.

What kinds of places will *Eye Of The North* visit?

Initially, of course, you'll be in Ascalon – previously destroyed, burnt and charred by The Searing – a nasty little battle play utilised by the Charr a little way into *Prophecies*. Then, as well as being

underground in the treacherous 18 dungeons of the expansion (replete with molten lava or bitter ice, depending on their theme), three hugely different environments will be ripe for the plunder. The Charr homeland (a surprisingly lush and verdant place for such a violent bunch), the harsh wilderness of the Far Shiverpeak mountains and the rainy waterlogged barrens of the Tarnished Coast.

What kind of numbers will *Guild Wars* obsessives be desperate to hear?

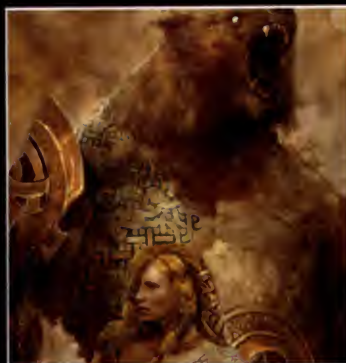
Eighteen multi-level dungeons. Lots of new items, weapons and associated paraphernalia. 150 skills liberally sprinkled over the ten existing professions. Ten new Heroes. Forty new armour sets. Three French hens. Two turtle doves. One partridge in a fruit-bearing orchard variety of tree.

A persistent world in the sequel?

That's not very *Guild Wars*...
"Guild Wars people like the fact that they don't have to pay

So who exactly just moved in next door?

The *Eye Of The North* expansion plays out in three directions. The feuding Norn need helping out with the encroaching Destroyer menace; a lost bunch of chaps from top-side need rescuing from the turf of the Charr, who're currently bemoaning a sudden lack of godly input; and the Asura's magic skills need to be complemented by more than a little rough and tumble with the playing public. The sweet-as-sixpence Sylvari are knocking around too. With all the above available as playable races come *Guild Wars 2*, perhaps a few more details are in order...



The Norn

"The Norn are a race of half-giants," explains game designer James Phinney. "They're focused on having adventure, not being afraid of getting into fights and trying to prove they're the strongest." Living on the edge of the known world, they're also gifted with the ability to shapeshift, something that'll come in handy as a racial ability come *GW2*, where players can turn into bears for added violence in combat and the ability to retrieve honey from high trees.

The Charr

The Charr used to be one of the villains of the piece, but have now become somewhat superseded in nastiness by the current state of Tyrian world affairs. Living in warmongering tribes, they're all about victory, and don't care much about boring stuff like morals – and don't really get the concept of 'not killing people'. By the time *Guild Wars 2* rolls around and the Charr are playable, there'll have to be a slight thaw in northern Ascalon's race relations.



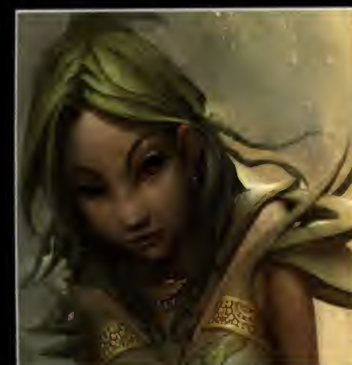
The Asura

Small in stature, brimming with self-confidence and rather sweet in a droopy way, the Asura are furry, big-eared goblins whose prowess in magical engineering is unmatched anywhere on, or under, the map. They think they're better than everyone else despite their stature and are rather uppity with it. If you want a free know-it-all, big-eared smart alec to trail around after you, we're giving one away free this issue – turn to page 17 for more.



The Sylvari

Every MMO needs faerie folk, thus the inclusion of the wide-eyed nature spirits who've turned up what with what ArenaNet call 'a new age in Tyria'. They're sweetness and spice and mostly things nice, and are fundamentally ace at magic. What's more, seeing as they've only been in existence for a couple of years, they spend much of their time rushing around and gushing about how pretty everything is.





"Guild Wars charted real new territory. GW2 is not about to walk away from that"

Jeff Strain, co-founder, ArenaNet

The Charr don't really go for 'sweetness and light' vibes.

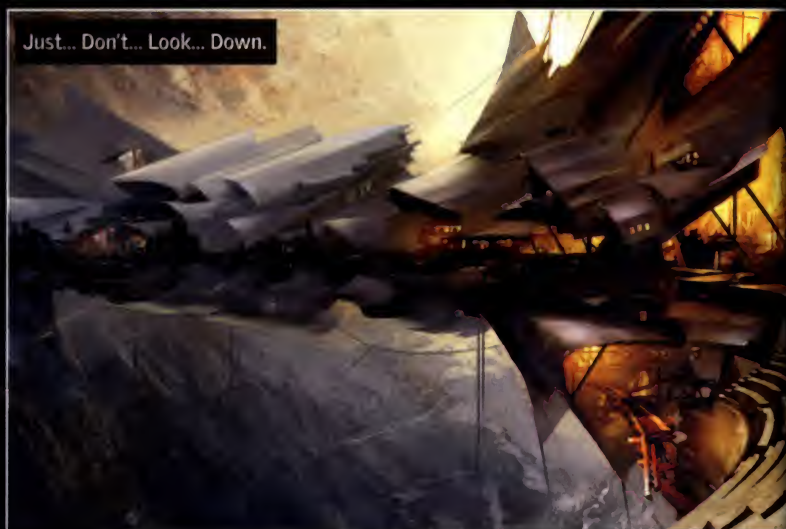
subscription fees," explains Jeff Strain. The refrain we've always seen is, 'Yeah well, there's no subscription fee and I enjoy the game – but it's not a real MMO.' The reason they can do that is because it's not a persistent world."

And so in *Guild Wars 2*, instead of the now-traditional hubs and party-only instanced adventuring, an entire world is being mapped out for you to saunter through at the exact same time as everybody else. Persistence will be supplemented

by branching chains of events throughout the game's zones.

For example, there might be a rampaging beast that needs a contingent of players to deal with it. Failure to do so will mean the destruction it leaves in its wake will need to be repaired by NPCs who, in turn, may need player protection. What's more, the levelling system of old doesn't quite fit the persistence template – so it's fair to expect more of a *WOW*-esque state of affairs.

Just... Don't... Look... Down.





The Norn are a proud Viking race, and can change into scary beasts.

So is *GW* turning into a *WOW* clone?

"We're not interested in going out there and reinventing the game as a traditional MMO," underlines head honcho Jeff Strain sternly. "*Guild Wars* charted real new territory and had a unique design that really added to the strength of the game. *Guild Wars 2* is not about walking away from that. We view adding a persistent world as an augmentation to the *Guild Wars* design that we've already got: adding persistence around the core of *Guild Wars* rather than reinventing and building from the inside-out."

So consider yourselves told: there's no way your Norn half-giant is going to be chowing down on stringy wolf meat outside the AH, so if you're an obsessive, stop your fretting.

Where's the story going to pick up?

A hundred years after the events of the original *Guild Wars* triptych (well, triptych, plus expansion pack). Tyria is still coming to terms with the bad stuff heralded by the close of the *Eye Of The North*. Uneasy truces exist between the various races that peppered *Guild Wars*' closing chapter, and with an ethos of team spirit and pulling socks up, a dark enemy is being faced up to.

The setting is that of *Prophecies* once again (suggesting perhaps that NCsoft are planning on trotting out excursions in *Factions*' Cantha and *Nightfall*'s Elona as time rolls on), but don't expect to revisit exact locations. The unique *GW* artistic stylings will remain, but direct topographical recreations of Ascalon and Kryta won't make themselves known.

How are they upping the fun?

"One of the things we wanted to do with a persistent world is really make the environment a playground for players," says designer James Phinney.

"There are a couple of different ways that we'll do this, and one is completely changing the way the controls work. Having direct controls that'll let you jump around, climb up on things, slide on things and go swimming. Players should really have a great freedom of movement and interaction with the environment. Trying to make good use of that in the world gives players the chance to have the joy of exploration."

And so with fireballs being jettisoned in different directions, more explosions than ever before and the god-given miracle that is jumping, the Korea-friendly simple bouts of

run, strafe, hack-and-slash of *Guild Wars* of old will be long-forgotten.

I resent human contact. Will I still have minions to bend to my whim?

Whatever happened to all the heroes? Well, they've bugged off that's what – you've got companions now. And, sadly, not companions in a sexy *Firefly* sex-lady sense either. If you want one you'll be tied to one at any time, and if you distrust NPCs and four-legged friends, you can select buffs in exchange for their presence.

In terms of more real interaction, that oft-bemoaned problem that plagues so many MMOs, a mate being a mere two or three levels above you and therefore too almighty to fight alongside, is set to be sidestepped through a neat application of *City Of Heroes*' much vaunted sidekick system.

Surely the place is going to get a mite crowded?

Not so. To avoid insanely populated areas, there'll be many identikit versions of Tyria spinning in the void that's the ArenaNet server room – and should you want to join a world or realm your mates are on, then an instantaneous and free jump from globe to globe will be available.

To promote community spirit meanwhile, in addition to the more traditional guild-on-guild action, these worlds will be able to go hammer-and-tongs at each other in an area known as The Mists.

"We'll match three worlds together at a time, with the world vs world area becoming a giant strategy game," says Phinney. "Picture it as a large area, the size of multiple maps in *GW1*, with a number of strategic points on it to control." And so, depending on how much territory each world possesses by the end of the bout, better teams will go up the ranks to face better competition, while dour tactic-less teams will go the way of Leeds Utd.

Will it shake Azeroth down to the very ground?

Don't be silly. But with a subscription-free ethos of *Guild Wars* enclosed in a persistent world, *GW2* is set to steal a ton of players from *WOW*, *Warhammer* and *LOTRO* alike. We're still looking at a distant release though – the Beta's planned for 2008 – so who knows what other MMO challengers will have stepped up by then. **PC7**

**PCZONE
CHARTS**

ChartTrack

- 1 **NEW** **STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL**
Issue 179 85%
- 2 **↓** **THE SIMS 2: SEASONS**
Issue 181 54%
- 3 **NEW** **SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC**
Issue 181 82%
- 4 **↑** **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 90%
- 5 **↓** **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BURNING CRUSADE**
Issue 179 93%
- 6 **—** **FIFA 07**
Issue 174 84%
- 7 **↓** **SUPREME COMMANDER**
Issue 179 88%
- 8 **↓** **THE SIMS LIFE STORIES**
Issue 181 57%
- 9 **—** **THE SIMS 2: PETS**
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Issue 175 91%
- 13 **↓** **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue 165 N/A
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- 17 **↓** **COMMAND & CONQUER: THE FIRST DECADE**
Issue N/A
- 18 **↑** **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 69%
- 19 **NEW** **WARHAMMER 40,000: DOW ANTHOLOGY**
N/A
- 20 **RE** **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
Issue 167 95%

**STALKER: SOC**

They did it. They took development hell and turned it into what the ads are calling a 'man-made hell.' But it's actually rather enjoyable.

**SILENT HUNTER 4**

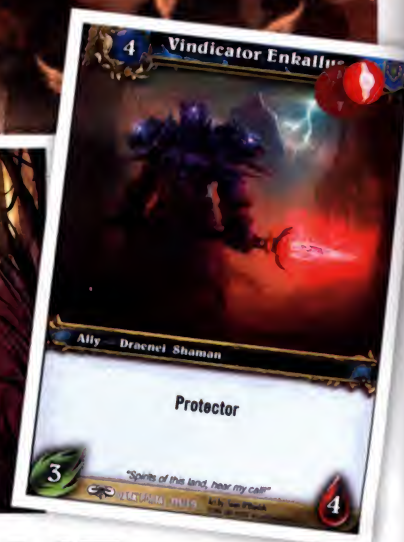
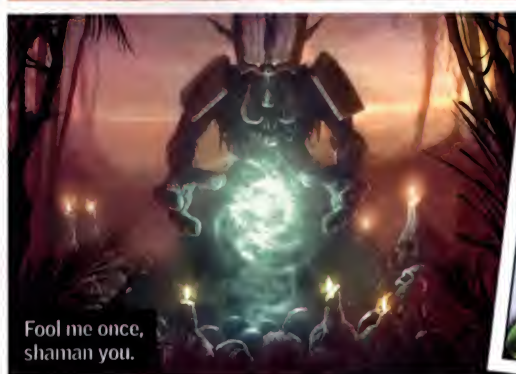
Another good Ubisoft game riddled with bugs – what's going on over there? Have work experience kids taken over the QA department?

**THE SIMS 2: SEASONS**

We had joy, we had fun, we had seasons in the sun. But then we bought *Sims 2: Seasons* and it was total f***ing bum. Repeat to fade.

**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**

If only they'd release an online variant of *Football Manager*, they'd be rolling in cash. Someone ought to give Sports Interactive a nudge...



PAINT YOUR DRAGON

An audience with a *WOW* trading card artist

entertainment.upperdeck.com/wow/en | ETA: Out now

THERE'S SOMETHING ENDEARING, yet spectacular about the art style of *World Of Warcraft* – something that spills over into spin-offs and trading card games alike. "WOW's use of colour is paramount – people respond to colours and the emotions they evoke," explains artist Sean O'Daniels – whose work can be found adorning one out of four different *WOW* trading cards we're giving away this issue. "Too many games today try to be realistic, tending to use desaturated or monochromatic palettes. Although this can be an easy way to give a consistent 'feeling', it can also leave everything looking the same. *WOW*'s colourful palette separates it from the competition."

The way the cards are designed is that the orders come to

the artist from the card-game designers up on high, generally saying something like: "Show this elf woman, wielding this weapon in this setting. Focus is the woman." From here, as long as specific Blizzard character designs and style guides are followed, the artist can interpret his own vision with relative freedom. "I always try to get a good idea of what the card's purpose is," explains O'Daniels. "From there, I try to determine what is the most important element or story I need to convey in the scene."

O'Daniels is relatively new to the fantasy illustration genre, but has done plenty of concept work on console games like *Metal Arms* and *StarCraft: Ghost*. If you want to check out more of his work, go to: members.cox.net/studio-od/conceptart. "My personal work can be found in galleries and private collections throughout California," he says. "I'm kind of going through my 'dog' phase at the moment." Aren't we all...



IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man who commands Crysis



CEVAT YERLI - CEO OF THE GOOD SHIP CRYTEK

After a childhood spent dabbling with simulation games and studying economics, Cevat (along with his brothers Avni and Faruk) set up Crytek in 1999. His name is pronounced 'chevat' rather than 'sevat', and if you say it wrong PR ladies frown at you...

So, in its current state, is *Crysis* everything you envisioned at the start of the project?

"At the very start, the game was probably a bit longer. Making the game longer would be no problem, but in order to have consistently high quality the game had to be condensed. It's a very, very busy game, with intense and pulsating gameplay. That's probably the only difference. On the upside, at the beginning I didn't dream we'd have both interactivity and photorealism..."

Is there much gameplay material that you're holding back from us?

"I think quite a few things; the ending for sure. You'll see that for yourself - it's big. I'm telling you, it's really big! Plus you've only seen the ice levels briefly, the zero-G levels we haven't shown anyone at all - and the aliens we'll never reveal. We'll hint to them, but never reveal them till you play."

The way the aliens are encased in metal shells is fairly tantalising...

"Yeah, those are their machines and vehicles. The real aliens live in zero-G. No-one's seen

them yet. Maybe around May we'll hint at them in screenshots. But you won't see them properly until you play. And I'm telling you, the first time you see them you'll shit your pants! Imagine the last good horror game you played - this is going to be like that, but every time you play it'll be different."

And I guess the ability to switch between armour, speed, strength and all that adds to the freedom...

"Yes. The player doesn't only have to choose a weapon, as you can change the mode of the nano-muscle suit. The enemies will react to both your customised weapon and suit, plus the environment is interactive and thoroughly damageable. All of this creates emergent gameplay. If you have a certain tactic in mind, you can express it..."

I was watching *Batman Begins* the other day, and thought the pre-spray batsuit was a little *Crysis*-like...

"When we designed the hero I said 'we don't want a tank. I don't want a *Warhammer 40,000*, *Unreal Tournament* or *Halo* hero.' They're all cool designs but I wanted

something that expressed the gameplay. I added muscle strains all over the body. When you move to a third-person view you can see how your suit adapts to the mode. *Batman Begins* was way later than when we were planning the game, but I guess in both cases it was about keeping it real - augmenting the change, not too bulky, wrapping it around the body. Real and cool."



tat Zone

Whenever we visit a game developer, it's our standard practice to loiter in reception at the end of our visit with the intention of stealing a pen, a pad or perhaps even a lock of Gabe Newell's lustrous hair. Then, on our return, we throw our stolen goods into a pile and sift through it for something decent to auction for charity. Sadly, it's at this point that the dead skin cells and hair strands of notable game developers are passed over. Visit us on eBay under our PCZoners tag and buy our crap...

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity. Honest.
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



THIS MONTH'S TAT



MARILLION STUFF
CD, DVD and PR guff from PCZ's new-found best band ever.



ANOTHER GUN BAG
Because there's nothing like carrying a bag that's both rootin' and tootin'.



SPORTS INTERACTIVE LADIES L T-SHIRT
'Gameplay > Polygons'. Don't tell the polygons.

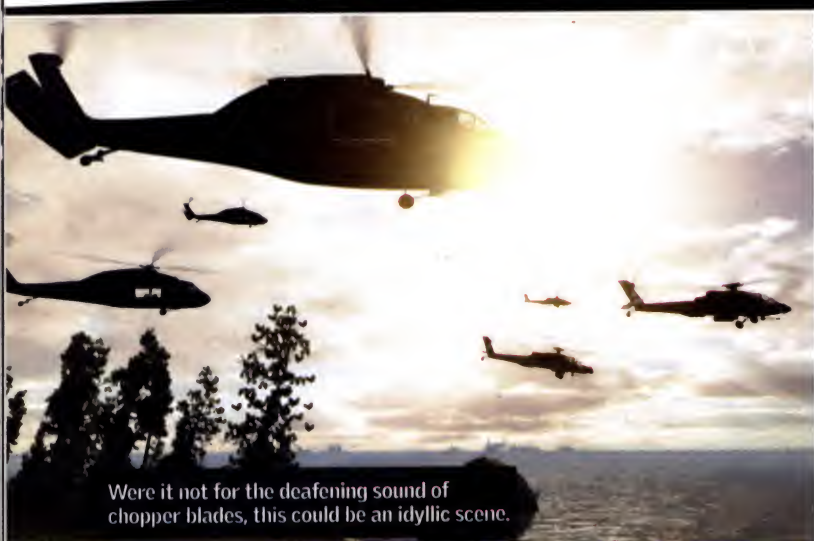


RIPPED COPY OF 'LEFT BEHIND' NOVEL
Graffitied, singed and dunked in coffee.

Don't go into that tat-door! Because there's something down there...

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	GUN BAG Not designed for carrying actual guns around. Books and stuff maybe.	£11.00	9
	ART OF EMPIRES BOOK Arty pictures of men in big hats pointing and shouting. Whatever floats your boat...	£6.25	8
	HEADCRAWB HAT Huge price for headgear that no-one in their right mind would wear in public.	£55.55	18
	WORLD IN CONFLICT T-SHIRT Perhaps would have got a better price if Will had remembered to put the photos online. Sorry, charitable cause!	£6.50	8



Were it not for the deafening sound of chopper blades, this could be an idyllic scene.



All together now: "Ka-boom!"

WORLD IN CONFLICT

Suzy Wallace witnesses a sudden thaw in Cold War politics...

DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment PUBLISHER Vivendi Games WEBSITE www.worldinconflict.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 178

THE LOWDOWN

- Stunning graphics engine ✓
- Solid SP campaign with an emphasis on characters ✓
- Innovative multiplayer requires true teamwork ✓
- Best nuke explosion you've ever seen ✓
- You'll need decent team-mates in multiplayer ✗

THE YEAR IS 1989. The antipodean warblings of Jason Donovan and Kylie Minogue drift from a nearby radio, while your dancing flower and sunglasses-wearing Coke cans wobble about like Oliver Reed after a heavy night. Meanwhile, somewhere in the distance, a faint noise is heard.

All of a sudden, sonic booms break the stillness, followed by the screeching sound of fighter jet engines. A closer boom rattles the shelves and a descending high-pitched tone indicates an incoming missile. Wondering what's going on, you stumble outside before gasping in shock. Parachutes fill the air and in the distance, Russian tanks rumble over countryside. An explosion hits a nearby house – one thing's for sure – the Cold War hasn't ended; it's only just begun.

That's the setting for *World In Conflict* and it's a huge departure from Massive's normal sphere of storytelling, namely sci-fi and its world of intergalactic plottings and alien races intent on human destruction.

Russia, on the brink of economic ruin, has decided to go all-out and invade

Western Europe before turning their attention to America. But, as Massive's president Martin Walfisz is keen to point out, they're not just cobbling together any load of old rubbish to explain why the Cold War has gone so differently this time round.

THE NAME'S BOND, LARRY BOND

No, to aid in the creation of a believable backstory, they've employed the skills of Larry Bond, who, alongside Tom Clancy, penned *Red Storm Rising*, a massively successful book on the subject of a hypothetical conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Bond's skills are being used to flesh out the scene and explain just why Russia's decided to attack and exactly where the frontlines will lie.

Walfisz also stresses that they want to keep the single-player campaign "accessible and emotional", adding that the real stars of the show are the characters. Massive are keen to put an emphasis on you feeling part of a bigger team – so after the Soviets have attacked Seattle, you take control of a chap called Parker, who'll be taking commands from a gruff Colonel Sawyer.

NO, I KNOW BEST...

Reeling from the sheer boldness of the attacks, and surely with a nod or two to Pearl Harbor (the last military assault on the USA), in-game cut-scenes show the characters arguing over plans, while cracks soon start to show in their

relationships – adding a definite personal dimension to an otherwise detached RTS conflict.

However, I haven't come all the way to Sweden just to listen to what Massive have got planned. So, after a swift demonstration, we're led to a bank of computers where I get my hands on 'The Battle Of Pine Valley', the third level in the game.

The second the loading bar disappears, the view provided by the Masstech engine is incredible. Unusually for a game of this genre, the camera allows for a view of the horizon and the effect is breathtaking. Positioned at one end of the sleepy town, the engine allows for a clear view over the detailed buildings, into the hazy sea lapping at the sandy shores beyond. Donut shops nestle next to diners, giving an all-American feel to the little town.

STREET FIGHTING

It's hardly the battle-ravaged scene you'd expect from the genre, but this is just the beginning. Massive have carefully chosen their environments to enable you to easily relate to them, so forget carefully laid-out military bases – here, you can expect to see battles raging around shopping centres and parking lots.

My first objective, eliminating a sniper nestled in a nearby tower, gives a good demonstration of some of the special abilities available. My APC vehicle draws near to the



It may be the Cold War, but it's far from chilly.



THE STORY SO FAR...

MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

A new dawn
Massive Entertainment are founded and set up shop in a place called Ronneby, Sweden.

1997



First steps
Massive release their first title *Ground Control*. A sci-fi RTS. It gets critical acclaim.

2000

Massive success
The sequel *Ground Control II: Operation Exodus* is loved by all – we give it 84%.

2004

Resolving conflict
The team drop their normal sci-fi setting and start work on *World in Conflict*.

2005

Massive are keen to put an emphasis on you feeling part of a bigger team, and want to make the single-player game “accessible and emotional”

Tanks get lonely too.

Looks like the end for Tom's Sports Bar.



The calm before the conflict.



Fog of war

Is it just me or is it getting darker?

BEFORE



AFTER



After eventually reaching the end of the single-player level, I casually glance over at the screen of the journalist next to me. Whether it's through his own rubbish skills or just because he'd had to start again, he was back at the beginning of the level and it was only then that, among the knocked-over telegraph poles and damaged buildings, I noticed one of Massive's most subtle but impressive graphical effects.

From damaged buildings to burning units, as the amount of destruction in the level increases, the beautiful blue sky overhead is mottled by a dull, grey smoke that rises to gather overhead in ominous clouds, and the colour palette takes on a definite subdued shade. It's an incredibly subtle effect, which I didn't even notice until given a comparison, but it's just one example of the detail Massive are lavishing upon this title.

With multiplayer that really feels genuinely exciting, Massive are onto something really special here

Explosions in *World In Conflict* are truly impressive.



Tanks work best as a team – as shown to devastating effect here.



Urban warfare

Using a mix of promo videos and our own lurid imagination, we suggest some settings for conflict...



1. Burger King. Are you a huge McDonald's fan? Annoyed that last week's bun on your Whopper was soggy? Here's your chance for revenge.



2. The shopping centre. What better way to battle the crowds of a Saturday than to come along in a tank? Now every day is sales day.



3. The playground. Never again will you have to sacrifice your seat on the roundabout to someone whose age is in single figures.



4. The circus. We'd like to envisage clowns and monkeys with guns in slow-mo fights, but things could even out once the tigers are released.



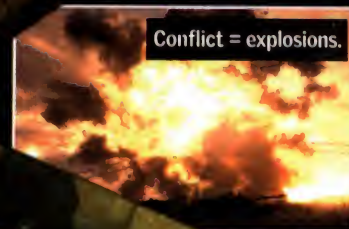
Fact: you can never have too many tanks.



"Mummy, are those aliens?"



Sample the high life with *World In Conflict*.



Conflict = explosions.



Grey = unhappy ending.

reinforcements arrive. However, it's not long before trouble looms again and I'm called to reinforce a local shopping centre, which is handy since I need to pick up a doorstep from Robert Dyas anyway...

DROPPING THE NUKE

By this point I'm gaining tactical aid points – which is where things start to get really interesting. Gathering these babies gives you access to the tactical aid system – a series of frontline help options that range from concentrated artillery barrages to anti-tank A10 Warthog strikes and even the big daddy of back-ups: the much-touted nuclear strike. And so an enclave of enemies are swiftly pounded to dust by my freshly summoned artillery, and my units happily swarm over the remains of the previously intact and heavily occupied TV station.

A few command points later, and after one hefty struggle in which I valiantly manage to survive with only a handful of soldiers, the culmination of the mission comes in defending the town square. It's a chaotic few minutes, with enemy troops pouring in from all directions and requiring some deft

navigation of the map to keep an eye on all units and entrances, helped by the inclusion of what Massive are calling their mega-map (showing the entire level of allied and enemy unit positions, updated in real-time). Eventually I win and the level finally finishes, with the sudden abatement of the non-stop action leaving me happily drained.

NO 'I' IN TEAM

Next, I become a card-carrying member of the communists and give online a try. Here, Massive are really aiming for something unique. Liberally borrowing features from online shooters such as *Counter-Strike* and *Battlefield*, the combatants in *WIC*'s multiplayer sign up to one of two teams, with up to eight players on each side.

Once a side has been determined, you choose your role from four options – air (attack and transport helicopters), armour (tanks), infantry or support (artillery and anti-aircraft). Once this has been selected and the battle has commenced, you're assigned a certain number of credits to purchase appropriate units – perhaps also buying a few units from other player roles at a higher cost.

As in *Battlefield* games, control of the map is defined by holding command points; take them all and win outright.

NEED A DRINK!

In stark contrast to most online RTS games, the emphasis here is clearly on teamwork. With each unit having its own particular vulnerabilities and requiring a completely different playing style, you'll clearly need the back-up of your team-mates. Luckily, Massive have built in a few systems to enable optimum communication such as voice-support and an intuitive request system to let your team-mates know when you need help, featuring short commands such as 'Need air support!' or 'Negative!', that will be instantly sent to your allies along with your position.

Destroying enemy units or capturing command points, meanwhile, tots up those tactical aid points and it's never long into the game that someone releases the first nuke. Everyone's screens fade to white for a second and for just a moment, all action ceases as everybody pans around, trying to get a better look at the amazing mushroom cloud billowing out from ground zero.

Elsewhere, other tactical aids continue their assault, with fighter jets swarming about in the air, delivering napalm strikes in strips that clear the scenery of units and vegetation alike.

Should you get bored with your role, you can always change it mid-game, à la *Battlefield* once again. With a decent team, the multiplayer side of *World In Conflict* could offer amazing potential, with an emphasis on teamwork that's never been seen before in the RTS realm. Put in the hands of an organised bunch of mates or a capable clan, the limits for tactical play are almost endless.

WORLD IN HARMONY

Considering that *World In Conflict* is still only at pre-alpha stage, things are looking mighty impressive. With one of, if not the most stunning RTS engine we've seen to date, a solid single-player experience and multiplayer that feels genuinely exciting and innovative, Massive are really onto something special here. With plenty of love and care over the rest of the year, Massive could well have a contender for the RTS of 2007 on their hands. **PCZ**



**HOT
SHOTS**

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – KINGDOMS

DEVELOPER THE Creative Assembly PUBLISHER Sega WEB www.totalwar.com ETA August

BIGGER, BOLDER AND certainly more crowded than any *Total War* expansion yet, *Kingdoms* is set to feature not one, but four hugely different campaigns set in heftily different situations, even if the common theme of blood on rusty metal prevails. The dusty siege-filled Crusades get a look in, as do the Germanic scraps that were the Teutonic Wars, a military plunge down into the more central bits of the Americas and some barneys on home turf with the Britannia campaign. Compared to *Barbarian Invasion* and *Alexander*, *Kingdoms* contains a trebuchet-load of extra goodness, being primed and ready to fire by The Creative Assembly offices over in Australia...



2

The Bigger Picture

1 READY TO PLAY?

There'll be 23 playable factions, including the crazy face-painted mugs of the Aztecs and the Native Americans. All medieval life is here, and they're all power-hungry.

2 HISTORY NOW

As well as covering all manner of important historical events, some leading figures of large-scale slaughter will be present on the battlefield, each with a few personal death-bringing tricks for use on the hapless enemy.

3 POINT TO POINT

Should you take over a vital strategic point, you'll now have the option to build goliath forts to help you fend off your rivals, or simply garrison your troops for later offensives.

4 KEBABS INCLUDED

What with all the new factions, 150 new units have been drafted in to complement them – including the wonderful-sounding Greek Flamethrower. Who knew the Greeks had flamethrowers?

5 PRAISE BE

It isn't all about the on-screen warmongering – when you're plotting your machinations from up on high, you'll now have tech trees that are influenced by Religion and Prestige.

6 RESCUE ME

On the battlefield, you'll now be able to control multiple armies in battle, including reinforcements who'll hopefully be appearing Gandalf-style, just when all hope seems lost.

7 GET OUT THE MAP

There'll be new mission modes in single-player, but if you're a slave to multiplayer, you'll be overjoyed to hear that there'll be six new scenarios and 20 new Custom Battle maps, with which to smite your friends.



3



4



5



6

**COMING
SOON...**

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

Will Porter breaks the seal on tombs so nice that Lara raided them twice...

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE www.tombraider.com/anniversary/ PREVIOUSLY IN... 180

THE LOWDOWN

Snazzy recreation of the original <i>Tomb Raider</i>	✓
Random culls of indigenous wildlife	✓
Causes instant hits of nostalgia	✓
Young 'uns might appreciate it less	✗
Console in nature	✗

**ETA
MAY**

SEEING AS THIS IS THE tenth anniversary edition of *Tomb Raider*, temporal logic would suggest that I was 17 when the original leapt into my affections. I like to imagine myself at that age as a rough-around-the-edges rogue who you really wouldn't want to mess with. Unfortunately though, my recollections of my first encounter with Ms Croft are of being attacked by on-screen wolves and plaintively whimpering, throwing temper tantrums at misplaced jumps and not washing for a day or so.

So ten years on and beer-gut enhanced (me that is, not Lara), what's changed? The idea behind *Anniversary* is that the iconic stuff will be as striking in its recreation, whereas the more forgotten rock-climbing bumf in-between is open for modern-day fiddling. So it is then that a fluffy cloud of fond memories shrouds many scenes – notably when you open two vast doors high up on a mountainside and watch your sherpa get mulched by wolves, or when you stand

straddling the camera in a misty valley with a slight premonition that something bad and dinosaur-shaped is about to happen.

This isn't to say that some of the smaller-fry puzzles haven't got a look-in though – take the site of Lara's first underwater swim, for example. This was in a blocky settlement of sorts, but now it's been lovingly recreated to look like a proper little village sheltering at the bottom of a big old cave – with that same resident bear, oddly horizontally dug well and traditional Peruvian block-push puzzles.

SHE'S STILL GOT IT

The main area that nu-Lara meets that of old – other than prettified body – is that of fluid motion and spry animation. Frustrating jumps are still present, but ten years of progress has gifted us auto-save as well as more responsive controls. The grapple hook of *Legend*, meanwhile, makes an unchronological reappearance – while Lara's new-found ability to perch on the more pointy bits of ancient architecture adds a fair whack of vertigo

to affairs. Finally, when offing the animals unfortunate enough to stumble into her path, a true vestige of the future has entered the hallowed halls of Croft's debut: bullet-time. Or at least a version of it that lets you dive to the side in slo-mo as an animal charges, watching target reticules zero-in to your predator's forehead, and nabbing a few cheeky head shots.

The main challenge for *Anniversary* to overcome though comes simply through the way that games have changed in the past ten years. Back then, you needed to use your imagination to fill in the graphical blanks and flesh out the atmosphere of these lost underground civilizations. These days though, your graphics card does all the hard work.

Can Lara truly retain that sense of innocent wonder? Will a cheat code revert her boobs to pyramids? Will there be lots of bits where you jump from one rock to another? All these questions and more will be answered come next month's review. **PCZ**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

WALL WALKER

Legend's grapple hooks return, but now they'll allow you to run across walls *Prince Of Persia*-style every now and then – albeit with a rope.

GRENAD-FREE

Just the dual pistols for you m'dear, plus the shotgun and all that later on. Watch out though, some of the animals are a mite bigger than we remember.

BIG FAT BALLS

Another return from *Legend* is the occasional physics object that needs manhandling into the relevant slot. The ancients were quite obtuse in their ways, really...

CORINTHIAN CAPERS

As shown by these charming columns, one of Lara's adventures is Grecian. Otherwise, she'll be visiting Peru, before trekking to Egypt and the lost city of Atlantis. Again.



So, ten years on and beergut enhanced (me, not Lara), what's changed?



Mixing past and present, *Anniversary* brings back fond memories – and Lara looks better than ever.



IT'S A FUNNY OLD ONLINE GAME...

FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

THE LOWDOWN

- Brand new online-only Football Manager game ☒
- Accessible to newcomers and hardened vets ☒
- Excellent eBay-style transfer market ☒
- Player-generated tournaments ☒
- May not be hardcore enough for diehard fans ☐

Exclusive! Martin Korda stalks the touchline to find out what's in store for Football Manager's plunge into online...

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive PUBLISHER Sega WEBSITE www.sigames.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

I'VE JUST BEEN spanked 5-0 by Sports Interactive's managing director, Miles Jacobson. Fielding a team of Slovakian journeymen and Serie B rejects, it's hardly a surprise to see the likes of Adriano and co cut my threadbare defence to pieces like a hot chainsaw through melted butter. But it's early days yet and with this being only my first match of a game that every *Football Manager* fan has been crying out for, I'm not going to get too depressed just yet. With Jacobson onboard for a re-match, all I have to do now is turn this bunch of no-hopers into would-be challengers. And there lies the instant appeal of *Football Manager Live*...

Having said that, online *FM* isn't quite what you'd expect. Rather than being a straight online port of the latest *FM* iteration, it's more like a cross between a watered down *FM07*, Fantasy Football and an auction site like eBay.

The brainchild of Sports Interactive co-founder Oliver Collyer, the game began as a two-man operation when said Collyer brother returned from his global wanderings with his waning passion for games development re-ignited.

"When Oliver came back from his travelling, he realised that he wanted to

make games again, and he'd been thinking about a more mainstream, massively multiplayer version of *Football Manager*," explains Jacobson.

E-BUY

Your first task is to choose a squad while keeping your wage bill below £100,000 – which may well explain to you my initial reliance on Eastern European bruisers and ageing Italians. Once you're happy with your selection, it's time to start delving into the transfer market, which, just like in *Football Manager*, is already looking like being one of the game's most instantly enjoyable features.

Teams can transfer-list their unwanted players, after which, you and your rivals have a designated time period (usually 24 hours) in which to place bids. Once this time-frame has expired, whoever has the highest bid gets the player. However, if you're of an impatient ilk, you can also stump up a

pre-set price to buy the player outright and instantly trump all other bidders in one Chelsea-esque swoop.

DON'T MENTION LEEDS

But there's a catch. Y'see unlike in *Football Manager*, you have no control over a player's earnings, as each one has a designated wage demand. This means that rather than mindlessly buying up everyone, you'll have to operate thrifly if you're to balance your expenditure with your initially paltry income. Overstretch yourself and you'll soon find administrators kicking down your door and putting all of your assets up for sale.

Newly purchased players become contracted to you for four weeks, after which you can decide whether or not to extend their deals, or whether to jettison the useless bastards in favour of a new batch of wannabes. It really is as simple as buying that three-speed blender you've always wanted on eBay.

"We'd definitely like to attract lots of newcomers and lapsed FM players"

Miles Jacobson, managing director, Sports Interactive

ETA
**MARCH
2008**

Zinedine Zidane
French - AM C - Martin Korda FC

Statistical Attributes	Mental Attributes	Physical Attributes
Composure: 13	Aggression: 15	Acceleration: 6
Concentration: 15	Anticipation: 15	Agility: 10
Decisions: 15	Bravery: 10	Balance: 10
Flair: 15	Composure: 14	Jumping: 9
First Touch: 15	Concentration: 14	Natural Fitness: 10
Free Kicks: 15	Creativity: 10	Pace: 6
Heading: 12	Decisions: 10	Stamina: 8
Long Shots: 10	Determination: 10	Strength: 10
Long Throws: 5	Flair: 20	
Marking: 5	Influence: 13	
Penalties: 17	Off The Ball: 12	Goalkeeping Rating: 10
Penalty Taking: 15	Positioning: 13	Condition: 95%
Tackling: 13	Teamwork: 12	
Technique: 10	Work Rate: 12	

Contract
First Name: Zinedine
Second Name: Zidane
Born: 23.06.1972 (aged 35)
Nationality: FRA
Caps: 93 (26 goals)
Real Life Club: Real Madrid
Height/Weight: 185 cm/80 kg
AM C
Preferred Foot: Right
Team: Martin Korda FC
Wage: £28,750
Contract Expires: Fri 6th Apr 14:52
Loan Ends: None

Performance Summary
Injuries: None
Banned for 1 Serious Friendly match (Yellow Cards)
Match Rt: Plans to retire on 06.04.2007
Morale: Ok

Points List & Awards

Points List	Goals	Assists	WC	FC	Match	Avg Rating
Youth Overall	13	1	4			6.54
Senior Friendly	4	1	1			6.39
Senior Competitive	17	1	5			6.13

Petulant headbutting: 20.

Users And Teams
49 Teams In Game World

Rank	Team	Manager	Wage	Points	Goals	Assists	WC	FC	Match	Avg Rating
1st	Martin Korda FC	Miles Jacobson	£100,000	100	10	5	10	10	10	7.50
2nd	Carpathia Hamburg	Carpathia Hamburg	£100,000	95	10	5	10	10	10	7.40
3rd	Slingshot/bridge Town	Slingshot/bridge Town	£100,000	90	10	5	10	10	10	7.30
4th	The Casuals	The Casuals	£100,000	85	10	5	10	10	10	7.20
5th	Bajan FC	Bajan FC	£100,000	80	10	5	10	10	10	7.10
6th	24 DEEP BEEP	24 DEEP BEEP	£100,000	75	10	5	10	10	10	7.00
7th	Los Righlencos	Los Righlencos	£100,000	70	10	5	10	10	10	6.90
8th	Galatians AFC	Galatians AFC	£100,000	65	10	5	10	10	10	6.80
9th	Re-Return of the Mac	Re-Return of the Mac	£100,000	60	10	5	10	10	10	6.70
10th	Salton Park AFC	Salton Park AFC	£100,000	55	10	5	10	10	10	6.60
11th	FC FC	FC FC	£100,000	50	10	5	10	10	10	6.50
12th	Lulu XI	Lulu XI	£100,000	45	10	5	10	10	10	6.40
13th	AC Croydon	AC Croydon	£100,000	40	10	5	10	10	10	6.30
14th	Dixie's Army	Dixie's Army	£100,000	35	10	5	10	10	10	6.20
15th	A Friend FC	A Friend FC	£100,000	30	10	5	10	10	10	6.10
16th	Sunda FC	Sunda FC	£100,000	25	10	5	10	10	10	6.00
17th	AC Length	AC Length	£100,000	20	10	5	10	10	10	5.90
18th	Uppala Curvans	Uppala Curvans	£100,000	15	10	5	10	10	10	5.80
19th	FC Transcetti Provra	FC Transcetti Provra	£100,000	10	10	5	10	10	10	5.70
20th	Rio Verde	Rio Verde	£100,000	5	10	5	10	10	10	5.60
21st	Cranted Chaos	Cranted Chaos	£100,000	0	10	5	10	10	10	5.50
22nd	Carolina Villa	Carolina Villa	£100,000	-5	10	5	10	10	10	5.40
23rd	You really	You really	£100,000	-10	10	5	10	10	10	5.30
24th	Si Bragg	Si Bragg	£100,000	-15	10	5	10	10	10	5.20

Each match result has a bearing on your rank.

THE STORY SO FAR...

**SPORTS
INTERACTIVE**



The legend begins
Brothers Oliver and Paul Collier create the very first *Championship Manager* game.

Pitchside
The release of *Champ Man 4* sees the debut of the top-down 2D match engine.



SEGA
Sega buys SI after the developer parts ways with long-time publisher Eidos.

Football Manager
With Eidos owning the name rights to CM, SI renames its franchise to *Football Manager*.

1992

2003

2004

2004 again



just without the worry of whether it'll get to you in one piece.

"We're really trying to aim this game at both existing players and newcomers," continues Jacobson. "Existing *FM* players will enjoy it for sure, but it's a bit less in-depth. We'd definitely like to attract lots of newcomers and lapsed *FM* players. *Football Manager* on the PC isn't really a pick-up-and-play kind of game. The people who play it tend to put a lot of hours into it, so as their personal circumstances change, whether that's getting busier with work or family commitments, they sometimes have to leave their beloved *FM* behind. We see *Football Manager Live* as a potential solution for those people."

PLAYER POOLS

FML already features a vast pool of players from around the globe, though when you start a new game, you'll quickly find that many well-known superstars remain unsigned. If you stumble across an unsigned player who fits into your plans, you can then begin a wage auction – a 24-hour



bidding war for the player's services, with the team offering the most walking away with the spoils.

While many players remained unsigned by my human opponents in this Alpha build, what struck me as strange was that I wasn't able to bid for a large number of them, a concern that

Jacobson was quick to placate.

"With the Alpha code, there are around 50,000 players available when you start the game and you're choosing your squad – but if we left all of those players available after the initial squad picking, there would be no transfer market in the game, as there would be so many available on free transfers. So, as more teams

Leagues ahead

No preset compos, just whatever your heart desires

One of *FML*'s most exciting features is the ability to create your very own tournaments. These range from knockout cups to marathon-style leagues, where you'll be able to preset every minute detail when creating a competition, be it two or three points for a win, one- or two-legged knockout matches or prize money allocation. What's more, you'll be able to restrict entry to your leagues and cups by rank, meaning that the top teams won't always be able to gatecrash a group of lesser-ranked teams and walk away with the spoils. Once a competition is set up, each team has to play their fixtures in a set time or matches are auto-resolved. So even if you don't have time to play all your games, you won't be penalised too harshly.





Little more than a consolation.

Become an FML Beta tester

Football Manager Live Beta keys up for grabs!

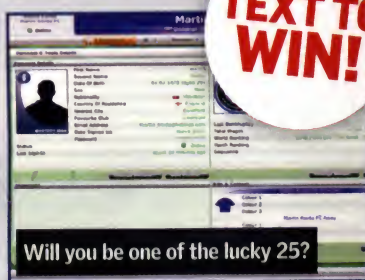
Want to try out Football Manager Live for yourself? Want to have a say in shaping the final version? Then you're in luck, because we've teamed up with Sega and Sports Interactive to bring you the chance of winning one of 25 FML Beta keys, that'll see you playing the game *this summer* with PC ZONE – months before anyone else!

All you have to do is answer the simple question below...

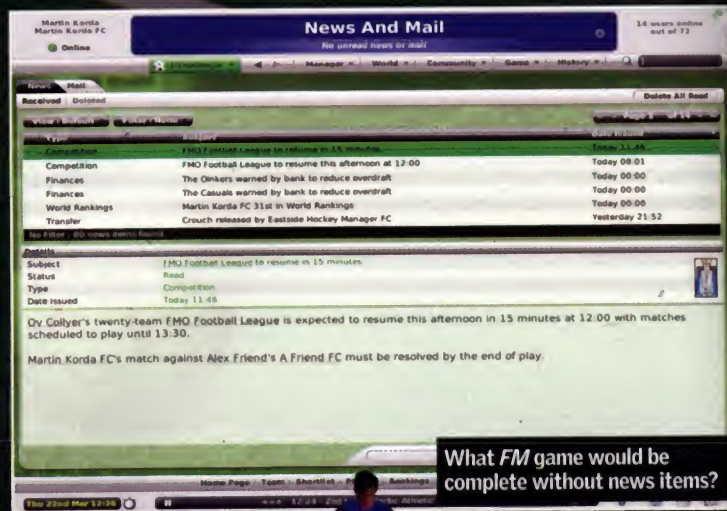
What's the name of the Sports Interactive co-founder behind *Football Manager Live*?

- A: OLIVER CROMWELL**
B: OLIVER COLLYER
C: OLIVER HARDY

To win, simply send a text message to 80889. Start your message PCZFM0, then a space, then either A, B or C, then a space, then your name and email address. It only costs 50p and you can enter as many times as you like. Competition ends May 23, 2007 and any entries received after this date will be rudely ignored. Standard competition and texting rules apply – see page 9. If you don't want to receive details of further offers and promotions from Future Publishing or God knows who, please put the word NO at the end of your text message. If you want to forget all this 21st century nonsense and enter by post, you can do so by sending a postcard to PC ZONE FML Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.



Will you be one of the lucky 25?



What FM game would be complete without news items?

join the game world, it opens up a few players for the rest of the teams in that world." Panic over.

THE REMATCH

So, back to my attempts to build a competitive team. Having won a few auctions for players I could actually afford – Zidane, Davids, Rui Costa and several other ageing former superstars with over-inflated wage demands and creaking legs – I set about moulding them into a well-drilled tactical machine. After several hard-fought friendlies spent honing my tactics and deciding on my strongest line-up, it was time to face off against Miles Jacobson once more. Grabbing an early lead, I jiggered around the room before sending him a falsely modest message via the in-game chat system – for "Yeah, I got lucky there," see, "Mwahahahaha, revenge will be mine!" or some such bollocks – only to

look up at my monitor once I'd finished typing to find that his team had equalised. Bugger.

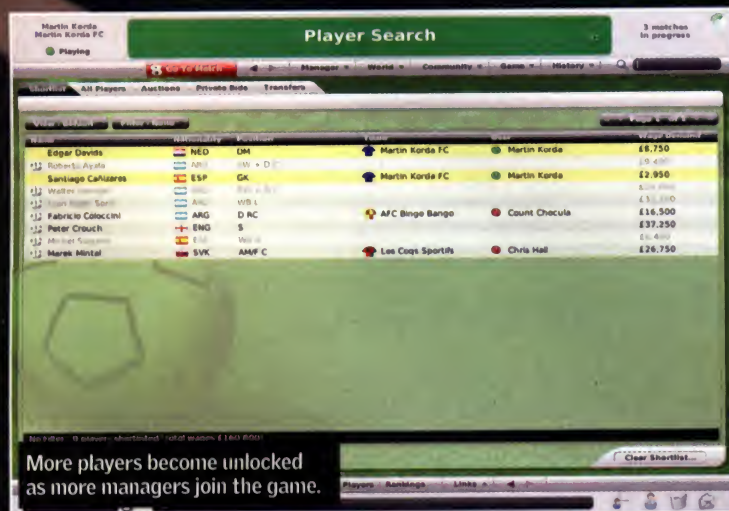
With minutes ticking down, I pulled my flagging players back, forming them up into a defensive wall, only for an Adriano 40-yard blunderbuss to shatter my dreams of an upset. Clearly, *Football Manager Live* can be just as cruel as the real thing...

SETTING THE TONE

Despite much of the game being toned down from FM's wealth of features, one side-feature that remains virtually untouched is the tactical screen, which comes replete with the usual list of hugely comprehensive options.

After setting your formation and choosing your starting line-up, you can then tweak the finer details of your masterplan, with an abundance of both Team and Individual Player instructions.

You're forced to think fast about making changes, just like in real life



More players become unlocked as more managers join the game.



It's instantly clear where a player's strengths and weaknesses lie.



FM Live mixes the hardcore elements of *Football Manager* with the auction-based features of eBay and Fantasy Football



Chat to your fellow managers in the Lobby.



Place bets to make matches that little bit more interesting.



We're not really sure which is the true dark side here.

But what about the actual matches? Well, you'll be pleased to know that these are already looking more than a little impressive. Akin to watching a game in *FM07* in Highlights mode, *FML*'s games typically last somewhere between five and ten minutes. You and your opponent are first given five minutes to submit a teamsheet to the ref, after which you watch the action unfold on the traditional top-down 2D match engine.

You and your opposite number can then make changes at any time, but with only a one-minute timeout allowed per team (during which the action is paused so that you can make your changes), most of your tactical tinkering must be made on-the-fly. However, far from being a hindrance, this mercilessly low number of pauses makes games feel far more realistic, by forcing you to think fast about where and how to make changes, just like in real life.

With the final whistle blown and congratulations passed between yourself and your opponent, it's time to head off to the rankings screen to see how your result has impacted on

your world standings. This is pretty important, because with higher-ranked teams earning more money, it's imperative to climb that ladder as fast as you can if you're to stand any chance of competing on a financial level with the top teams.

"You have a World Ranking which is based on points gained over a period of time, but the system to calculate those points is incredibly complicated," says Jacobson. "This is because we need balance for the different ways

that people will play the game, so we can offset the bias for the people who can be online longer and therefore play more matches than anyone else. Players can play as many games as they want each day, but they'll find that they start getting a lot less ranking points for each win if they play too many."

POSITIVE PORTENTS

Still far from finished and with a myriad more features yet to be implemented before release (the details of which SI

are keeping very much under wraps), *Football Manager Live* is already looking like succeeding in its goal of uniting the hardcore elements of *Football Manager* with the more mainstream auction-based features of eBay and Fantasy Football.

Granted, plenty of work clearly remains to be done in the aesthetics department. What's more, the ranking system needs greater clarification, and perhaps a player fatigue accumulation system would be a better way of punishing players who play too many games in one day, rather than lessening the amount of ranking points they're awarded for victories. However, overall, there's a huge amount to be excited about here.

With Sports Interactive and Sega still mulling over the best way of selling the game – currently they're looking at going down the subscription route – *FML* is looking like it could well be a management experience that's welcomingly open to all, a sim that rewards intelligent play but never penalises those less inclined to spend their lives online. Watch this space, because SI could be about to pull another world-beater out of their already ample management sim hat. **PC2**



Initially, each player starts on a four-week contract.



Keep an eye on your finances or the administrators will come a knockin'.



"The fastest racing game you'll ever play."

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You won't be disappointed."

PC GAMER 87%

"Fiercely addictive."

"TrackMania is officially, totally great."

PCZONE 86%

"Sheer speed, exhilaration
and outrageous tracks."

PCGZine 89%

"The racing is synapse shatteringly fast
and players with a creative bent
will be dancing in the aisles."

PCFormat 82%

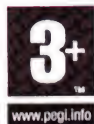
"It's unbeatable."

EDGE 8/10

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NADEO





PC ZONE 101 BEST GAMES EVER

The PC ZONE team pick their favourite games of all time – what will be our number one?

LET'S COMPILE A list of our most loved PC games of all time! It sounds like a bit of fun, doesn't it? Easy. If only we'd known. The following feature has taken the PC ZONE team weeks of heated discussions, office arguments, late-night drunken text messages and email abuse to whittle down the PC's entire 20-plus year output of games into just 101 titles – and that's before we even started thinking about number one...

However, the dust has finally settled, the swearing silenced and here we are – PC ZONE's 101 Best Games Ever. Enjoy the next 16 pages featuring the crème de la crème of PC gaming, then don't forget to let us know if you agree or disagree with our definitive 101 by sending an email to letters@pczone.co.uk or voting on our forums at www.pczone.co.uk. Shall we begin?





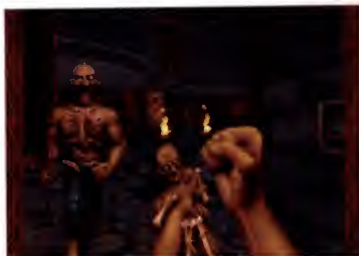
BLOOD

YEAR 1997

101

The *Duke 3D* clone that could... And absolutely did.

Fantastically imaginative maps, a bizarre steampunk vibe and the best level-set-onboard-a-moving-train ever. If the sequel hadn't been such an unremitting disaster, the *Blood* franchise could have lived forever. Toast those zombies! Pitchfork them in the head!



STARSIEGE: TRIBES

YEAR 1998

100

It cared not a jot for the single-player, but for truly original green-hill ski fun and remarkably canny foresight into the teamplay required in the online shooters of tomorrow (well, today), *Tribes* is worthy of its place in this list. *Vengeance* delivered story, but the original provided that true jetpack glory. We miss you *Tribes*. Come back soon.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

YEAR 2005

99

Finally emerging into the sunlight after the night-time races of *Underground*, *Most Wanted* was a brilliant blend of arcade racing, the obligatory 'pimp my ride' car customisation and car chases that put *Smokey And The Bandit* to shame. And dropping a giant donut onto a pursuing police car was so satisfying.



THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

YEAR 2004

98

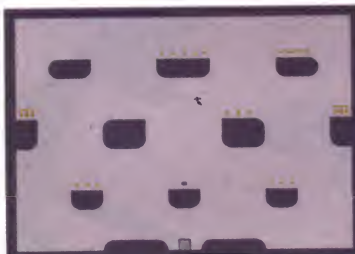
Escape From Butcher Bay is one of the best console-to-PC conversions ever. Vin Diesel was superb as the enigmatic see-in-the-dark Riddick, while the well-crafted story saw you exploring the universe's worst prison, chatting and swapping items with other inmates and enjoying first-person hand-to-hand combat that actually worked. Weapons could be anything from a guard's pistol to an improvised 'shiv' such as a shard of glass, and the stealth element allowed you to sneak up on enemies and push them into rock grinders or snap their necks like twigs. Also featured one of the best end-of-game levels ever. Shine on.

N

YEAR 2005

97

Fun and free Flash platform game featuring simple graphics and chucklesome ragdoll physics. Control a stick-figure ninja, as he jumps, slides and bounces around the levels, avoiding mines, missiles, electric fences and other nasties – fail and you'll usually end up as a pile of detached bloody limbs. Includes replays and online high scores. Unmissable.



WORMS

YEAR 1995

96

"Incoming!" The original – and still the best – version of the seminal multiplayer tactical battle game from Yorkshire-based Team 17. Four teams of four worms take turns to fire a twisted assortment of weapons, including the Dragon punch, Uzi and Bazooka, to wipe out each other. Simple, addictive, hilarious and still great today.

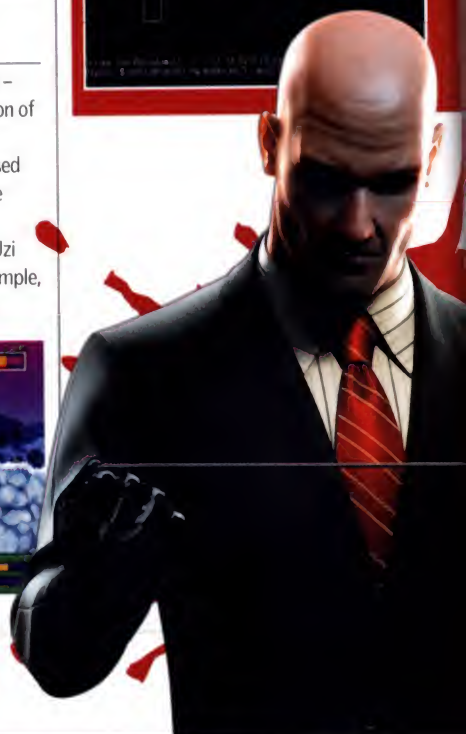


NETHACK

YEAR 1992

95

In *NetHack*, you play a @, fighting through dungeons with your trusty d(og). *NetHack* was ASCII adventuring – based on the 1980 game *Rogue* – at its finest, with gobsmackingly deep gameplay for a game you can find on your keyboard. You could win favour with gods, research dozens of scrolls and potions, even train your pet. Version 3.4.3 was released last year, and these days, you can use a graphical interface. If you're scared of capital 'D's, you big baby.



"Escape From Butcher Bay is simply one of the best console-to-PC conversions ever..."

PCZONE 101
BEST GAMES EVER



GRAND PRIX LEGENDS

YEAR 1998

92 The Steve McQueen of racing titles, *Grand Prix Legends* captured the romantic feel of the 1967 season, complete with staunchly authentic detail such as the rocket-on-wheels cars and handlebar moustaches. Incredibly hardcore, but packed full of adrenalin rushes from a time when safety was a secondary concern for the organisers of the World Championship.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

YEAR 2004

89 An update of strategy king Sid Meier's 1987 classic *Pirates!*, this is a buccaneering adventure taking elements of role-playing, trading, naval warfare, stealth and even rhythm action romantic dalliances to create a charming whole. Wonderfully engaging and accessible with great humour, this is pure buried treasure. Thar be gold!



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

YEAR 2003

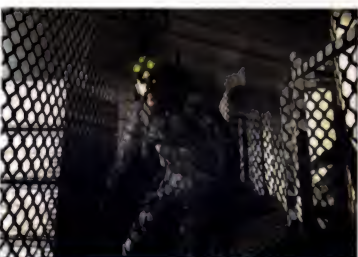
94 "Bugged, but brilliant" was our assessment of this hardcore WWII tactical shooter back in issue 136. Created by Illusion Softworks (makers of gangster hit *Mafia*), *H&D2*'s huge variety of unscripted levels – from stealth missions in the Burmese jungle to full-on assaults in the African desert – keeps it in our 101 best games list.



SPLINTER CELL

YEAR 2003

91 The *Splinter Cell* series, coupled with the *Thief* series, is one of the crowning jewels of the stealth genre. While later titles have brought even greater things to the table, the first was a genuine leap forward for PC gaming. Plus, with its 24-style narrative, gripping plot, Bond-beating gadgets and undeniably cool acrobatic moves, it's still brilliant fun to play today.



SUPREME COMMANDER

YEAR 2007

88 Big stompy mech robots destroying shit with lasers. Always good in our book – and *Supreme Commander* (created by Chris Taylor, the bloke behind *Total Annihilation* – see no.72) gives you the ultimate all-powerful walking turret to destroy your foes in this ambitious RTS. Humongous battlefields, tons of units and tech trees, exciting skirmishes and cracking multiplayer.



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

YEAR 2006

93 One of the PC's great underachievers, the *Hitman* franchise finally spawned a classic. Easy to pick-up-and-play, with great level design, including a hugely-populated Mardi Gras. However, it was the accidental deaths that proved a stroke of genius, allowing you to drop targets into shark pools or set them on fire with barbecue fuel.



SILENT HUNTER III

YEAR 2005

90 "We all live in a WWII submarine," sing the jolly submerged Nazis, just before a depth charge condemns them to a watery grave. *Silent Hunter IV* is the kind of game that only the PC could champion – join the crew of a U-Boat in a tense and hardcore simulation. Das Boot-iful.



GRIM FANDANGO

YEAR 1998

87 What's most memorable about *Grim Fandango*? The humour? The still-unique voodoo-tiki art direction? Or the fact that it was so hard that most people snapped in excess of 500 pencils before even getting to their car? Not hard like the obtuse nonsense that went on in the riddles of *Discworld* and the like. No, *Grim Fandango* had great logic. Which only made you feel even more stupid when you finally cheated. Which you did.



CAVE STORY

YEAR 2005

86 A Japanese freeware action-adventure platformer in the vein of *Super Metroid* or *Castlevania* with lovely old-school graphics, great level design and neat weapons. Escape from a complex underground cave network, while helping the cute rabbit-like inhabitants. *Cave Story* could easily be mistaken for a lost classic from the 16-bit era.



101 BEST GAMES EVER



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3

YEAR 2004

85 Peter Molyneux created *Theme Park*. Chris Sawyer created *Rollercoaster Tycoon*. David Braben then drew the spiritual strings of both together in a neat bow to create *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3*. A game your kid-sister would play, it also had the depth required to capture your bitter heart too. The real-life manager of Alton Towers must be a happy man indeed.



DESCENT

YEAR 1995

84 "Which way up am I? Is this the ceiling? Maybe I'll just rotate around a bit... Argh! It's one of the rocket-y ones!" All these experiences and more were part of the *Descent* play experience – a 360-degree shooter of panoramic robot-induced terror. And occasionally nausea. Its like shall not be seen again...



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

YEAR 2002

83 Notorious for its 'Ghoul II' technology that allowed for the gory blasting off of body parts, *Soldier Of Fortune II* was a brilliantly brutal shooter – especially in multiplayer. Whether real-life 'military consultant' and star John Mullins had ever crouched down and attacked a headless corpse with a knife while giggling is still unknown...



INDIANA JONES

and the
FATE of ATLANTIS

A GRAPHIC ADVENTURE
BY
HAL BARWOOD

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

YEAR 1992

82 Everyone bangs on about story-telling these days, but so often it boils down to a witty line or a third act reversal where aliens turn out to be quite nice after all. *The Fate Of Atlantis* did so much for gaming so far before its time that no bugger seems to realise. Like *Half-Life*, it had a game introduction you played through before the game kicked off; like the best roleplayers, it had different story strands to follow; and like *Half-Life 2*, it had a female sidekick you felt genuinely in cahoots with. Plus, it had Nazis. What's not to like?

THE MOVIES

YEAR 2005

81 It should have entertained so many more. The sheer joy of creating your own dumb cinematic masterpieces in *The Movies* has never been rivalled before or since. Single-player was a sideshow, admittedly, but with the mindblowing *Stunts And Effects* expansion in tow, your efforts, if not consummately professional, were never short of hilarious.



CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

YEAR 2001

80 Your favourite haunted house level extended over an entire game and punctuated by some of the creepiest sound effects rendered on CD, *Undying* was a relentless and brilliantly scripted affair. A first-person *Alone In The Dark* whose dank brilliance demanded a sequel, but instead got diddly squat.



F.E.A.R.

YEAR 2005

79 Spooky girl + paranormal special forces x slo-mo bullet effects/corridors = shitted trousers. *F.E.A.R.* is developer Monolith's most recent jaunt into the old ultra-violence, and managed to combine ridiculous gunplay with creeping unease and a handful of shocking moments. Japanese horror-movie-influenced and really rather proud of it.



TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC

YEAR 1999

78 It looked like *Half-Life* and sounded like *Half-Life*, yet had a taste and smell all of its own. Namely: 'teamy', 'tactic-ful' and 'absolutely raving bonkers'. With classes that fitted your personality in zodiac fashion, it's the little mod that could, would and then bloody well did. Roll on *Team Fortress 2*!



"The joy of creating cinematic masterpieces in *The Movies* has yet to be truly rivalled"

PCZONE 101
BEST GAMES EVER

FRONTIER: ELITE II

YEAR 1993

77 The enormity of space is oft-commented on, but has never been felt quite as acutely as it was here. Its progenitor may have cleaved its mark more firmly onto history, but with an increased roleplay feel to its trading, piracy, Viper-baiting and slave-shifting, as a mag we prefer *Frontier*. Plus: less silly 'ship in letterbox' docking procedures.



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

YEAR 2002

76 Immaculately designed, bravely pioneering and with a cracking script: the demise of *NOLF* ranks as one of the highest tragedies in gaming. Seamlessly merging its '60s setting with its gameplay and putting as much emphasis on dainty footwork and stealth as on blasting – Cate Archer is sorely missed.



FINAL FANTASY VII

YEAR 1998

75 Yes, it's a console port, but *Final Fantasy VII* remains a touchstone in role-playing games. Featuring the biggest tear-jerk moment, an epic story, great settings, excellent turn-based combat and an unforgettable soundtrack, the *FF* franchise has rumbled on, but *VII* is the one you'll be making your grudging grandkids play.



THE LONGEST JOURNEY

YEAR 1999

74 A breathtaking and absorbing trek through a world where fantasy and sci-fi combine. *The Longest Journey* was a traditional point-and-click through and through, but was also a deliberate foray into adult adventuring where easy laughs were not a priority, but narrative was. Buyer beware: this product does contain traces of penis.



UPLINK

YEAR 2001

73 There's no feeling like being somewhere you really shouldn't, and the excitement of evading the online fuzz was neatly captured by Introversion in *Uplink*. Gifting you the absolute buzz of fast-paced computer hacking without hazardous FBI interest, it may not look like much, but it can and will rock your geeky little world.



TOTAL ANNIHILATION

YEAR 1997

72 *Command & Conquer* brought strategy to the masses, but it was Chris Taylor and Cavedog who took the RTS mechanic, distilled it, put in some ballistic physics and 3D-lollapalooza and created sheer tactical gold. *Supreme Commander* has since followed in its wake, but *Total Annihilation*'s legacy will live longer in the memory.



FAHRENHEIT

YEAR 2005

71 "Well that's right, that's right, that's right, that's right, I really love you *Fahrenheit*!" sang Mud in 1974, with spooky foresight. From the artistic brainwaves of David Cage came a cinematic treatment of a game that bent itself around your actions, told its story the way you played it, and was so grown-up that it contained scenes that went way beyond second base. Playing as multiple characters that you honestly gave a shit about, and with a story that perhaps went that little bit too mad – but was at least a stunning and unpredictable beast – its spiritual follow-up *Heavy Rain* simply can't come soon enough.



101 BEST GAMES EVER



WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR

YEAR 2004

70 Back in the early days, *Warhammer* was all about the artistry of turning a hundred metal men into a vibrant army of inch-high warriors, so it's no surprise that this RTS outing was a gorgeous affair. Preferring fast surging warfare to plodding army building, it's an RTS of unique blood-splattered joy.



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

YEAR 2007

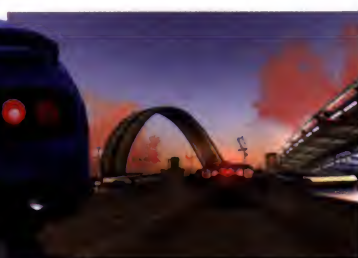
69 A diamond in the rough this one. Unpolished and unrelentingly Eastern European, yet wondrously scary and beautifully envisaged. Trekking around the Chernobyl fallout zone is a truly haunting experience, while the roving dynamic AI pulls all manner of surprises out of its hat. Pretty much worth the wait...



TRACKMANIA: UNITED

YEAR 2007

68 A racing game, a track construction kit, a virtual racing community – *TrackMania: United* is as mad as a box of frogs (no offence to French developers Nadeo), and a game likely to induce lucid speed-licked dreams in the most placid of participants. It may cause retinal damage, but the optometrists haven't caught on yet, so our secret remains safe.



GARRY'S MOD

YEAR 2006

67 What began as a way to make the G-Man appear to take Alyx roughly from behind has now bloomed into a *Great Egg Race* meets *Scrapheap Challenge* box of delights. Completely sandbox, completely stupid and quite possibly the most romantic entanglement you and your brain will ever have, this is one mod that has truly transcended its, erm, 'source' material.

SIMCITY 2000

YEAR 1993

66 OK, so technically the most fun you got from *SimCity* was turning on the riots, fires and alien invasion and watching your carefully crafted creation burn, but the management bits were damn good too. Plus, there was the added bonus that your new-found knowledge of city planning could be used to pass your geography GCSE. A classic of addictive gameplay from Maxis.



SWAT 4

YEAR 2005

65 After the abortive *Urban Justice* sank without a trace, it looked like the noble *SWAT* series was done for – until this top-notch instalment saved the day. Developers Irrational certainly didn't spare any grit as you led your five-man team through a series of challenging and at times unsettling scenarios. Decent multiplayer and a robust level editor completed the resurrection.



X3: REUNION

YEAR 2005

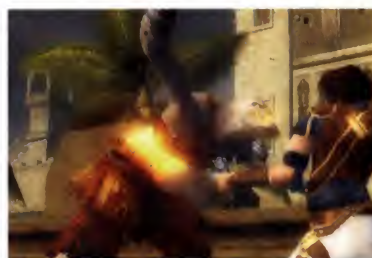
64 The learning curve may have been a little steep on the third game in the *X* series, but no-one ever said space life was going to be easy. What's more, once you mastered the umpteen controls required, this game really did offer everything you could ever wish for in a space sim. It demanded a lot, but gave a lot too.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

YEAR 2003

63 There he was, our once pyjama-clad Prince all grown up and muscly. A time-shifting, acrobatic, death-defying warrior – who was simultaneously crap with women and a bit of a ponce. Fight mechanics improved with two further *POP* iterations, but nothing came close to rivalling the inherent loveliness contained within *The Sands Of Time*.



"DK's robust design and British sense of humour ensure it remains relentless good fun even today"

DUNGEON KEEPER

YEAR 1997

62 One of the most loved titles to emerge from the late, great Bullfrog Productions, this fantastically wicked game turned us all into cackling dungeon keepers, prodders, pokers and fiddlers. Its robust design and rather British sense of humour ensure that it remains relentless good fun even today. Sim evil at its very best.



PLANESCAPE TORMENT

YEAR 1999

61 A firm favourite of RPGers everywhere, *Planescape: Torment* is still loved, still discussed and still sadly lamented. It was one of the first (and only) games to really capture the grimy weirdness of the Forgotten Realms world – pregnant walls, floating skulls, towers built around giants, the lot. Players



valiantly ploughed through the swathes of text in the game, proving that gamers will read anything and everything just as long as it's suitably interesting. Indeed, with its memorable characters, great dialogue and engaging plot, *Planescape: Torment* is the ultimate proof that games can be a powerful storytelling medium.

AGE OF EMPIRES

YEAR 1997

60 Another pillar supporting the giant mouse-shaped roof of the pantheon of strategy gaming, Microsoft's *Age Of Empires* is a true PC icon. The series has inspired a hundred copycat franchises, but few could touch this historical strategy classic. With sequels and expansion packs still rolling out, the series is an essential part of the PC gaming landscape.



STARCRAFT

YEAR 1998

59 With official patches still appearing from time to time, Blizzard's ongoing support for this sci-fi classic shows exactly how recognised the game is as an almighty icon of strategy gaming. Still played in RTS tournaments, still sublimely designed, still immaculately balanced. If the RTS genre were the Catholic church, *StarCraft* would be placed among the highest of saints – but only if it ever dies.



TIE FIGHTER

YEAR 1994

58 Sod Luke Skywalker, the prissy do-gooder – what every *Star Wars* fan really wanted was to get behind the controls of a TIE Fighter and kill that stupid farmboy Biggs. Well-crafted missions, secret missions on behalf of the Emperor and the best 'swoosh!' sound effects in spaceships... Oh happy, evil days.



GUILD WARS

YEAR 2005

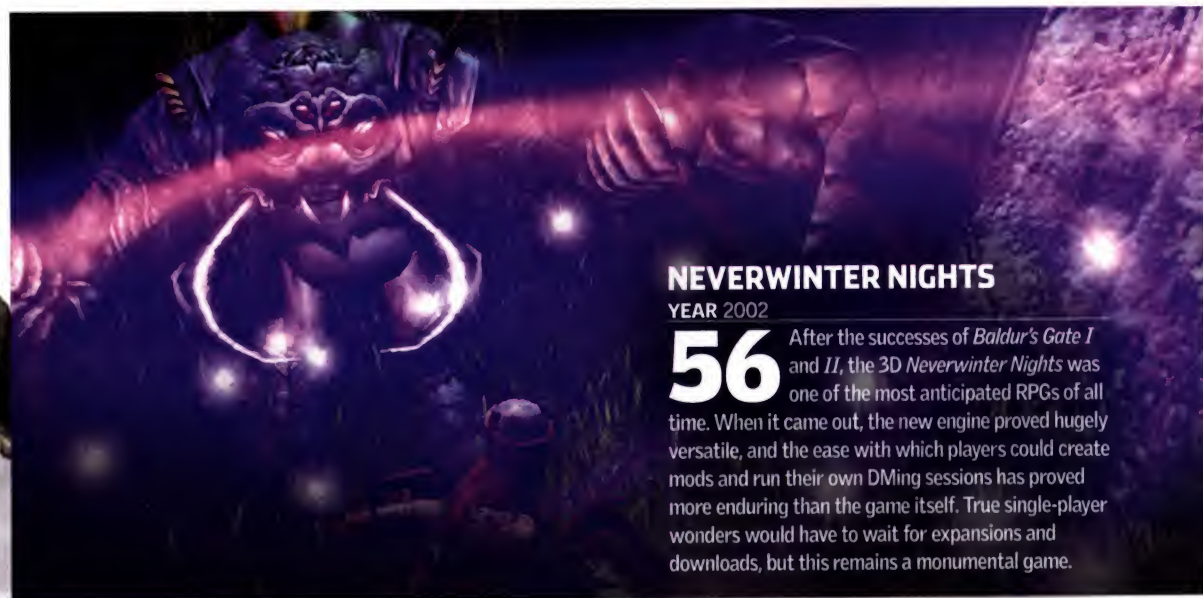
57 NCsoft's magnificent *Guild Wars* stuck two fingers up at the run-of-the-mill MMO templates, by opting for exciting, immediate and, just as importantly, free online action. It proved to be an extremely smart move on the developer's part, as it's still hiding behind metaphorical large rocks, then pouncing on grind-weary MMOers and enlisting them for the *Guild Wars* cause.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

YEAR 2002

56 After the successes of *Baldur's Gate I* and *II*, the 3D *Neverwinter Nights* was one of the most anticipated RPGs of all time. When it came out, the new engine proved hugely versatile, and the ease with which players could create mods and run their own DMing sessions has proved more enduring than the game itself. True single-player wonders would have to wait for expansions and downloads, but this remains a monumental game.

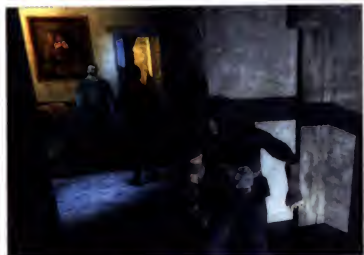




THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

YEAR 2004

55 Sadly kept at an arm's length from outright brilliance by Xbox considerations, Garrett's third outing in tea-leafing contained some of the best stealth money can buy. With a semi-persistent city allowing for a slice of freeform pilfering, plus the 'OMG scariest level eva™', *Deadly Shadows* was and is a taffing marvel.



TOMB RAIDER

YEAR 1996

54 Lara's first and, for some, best adventure saw the nature-hating archaeologist embarking on a globe-trotting journey to push ancient levers on four different continents. Introducing the most recognisable game character of all time, and having the sense to have her bosom defy gravity, the jumpy, shooty bits were fairly ace too.



MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

YEAR 2002

53 *Allied Assault's* Normandy landing mission remains one of the finest FPS levels ever. Lifelike yet cinematic, the mission defined this exhilarating shooter. Despite its inherent reliance on scripted action, you genuinely felt part of a fighting unit that was in constant peril. The solo bits and ending were complete shit though.



EVERQUEST

YEAR 1999

52 *EverQuest* was the first MMO to hit the big time and propelled the genre towards the mainstream. Its then ground-breaking persistent world Norrath allowed a massive 24,000 people to batter goblins online at any one time. Had *EverQuest* not grabbed the attention of the planet, there may never have been a *World Of Warcraft*. Just imagine...



CARMAGEDDON II: CARPOCALYPSE NOW

YEAR 1998

50 While it may have been much the same as its predecessor, it was still impossible to ignore the sheer unadulterated entertainment value of *Carmageddon II's* unsubtle yet irresistible mix of high-speed driving, car-trashing and pedestrian-ramming. Politically incorrect in the extreme, it was also bloody good fun.



STAR WARS: JEDI KNIGHT - DARK FORCES II

YEAR 1997

49 This shooter remains one of the finest examples of how to make a *Star Wars* FPS. Set in the aftermath of the second trilogy, you reprised your role as bearded pseud Kyle Katarn and battled an evil Sith lord in a Force power-packed intergalactic romp of blasting and lightsaber duelling. Genius!



THE SIMS 2

YEAR 2004

51 The little burbly morons that we, in all honesty, love having to hate are nevertheless wrapped up inside a jawdroppingly well-designed game. At one end brilliantly geared to a dollhouse mentality beloved by the mainstream, and at the other allowing us to watch them catch fire and die – small wonder it sells bucketloads. Expect *Spore*, (next from *Sims* creator Will Wright) to be near the head of this list come its release...



"Beyond Good & Evil is a jaunt of startling depth and character – it's nigh-on unforgettable"



SYNDICATE

YEAR 1993

48 One of Bullfrog's finest-ever creations, you played as the director of a massively powerful global corporation who were hell-bent on annihilating your competitors and setting pedestrians on fire. Controlling four drug-fuelled soldiers in isometric battles, the action/strategy mix was a precursor to the likes of *Command & Conquer* and *Commandos*.



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

YEAR 2001

45 A game of wondrous chills, this fright-fest made use of stunningly understated lighting and sound to generate genuine terror. Playing as a human (amazing!), a Predator (really good!) and an Alien (a bit confusing!), it also made for some of the tensest multiplayer action ever seen on PC. It's also the best film-licensed game money can buy.



X-COM: UFO DEFENCE

YEAR 1994

43 Long before the likes of *Total War* combined strategic maps with 3D battlefields came this superb tactical romp, in which you battled invading aliens. Split into two sections – a tactical map for troop movement and resource gathering, alongside a turn-based 3D battlefield – *X-Com: UFO Defence* was simply light years ahead of its time.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

YEAR 2003

47 An unfairly overlooked adventure, *Beyond Good & Evil* is a jaunt of startling depth and character, in which you play photo-journalist Jade (who you fancy), who's accompanied by her piggy uncle (who you don't). Recruited to expose an alien conspiracy, its delightful puzzling and oddly Rastafarian rhino mechanics made it nigh-on unforgettable.



COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE

YEAR 2001

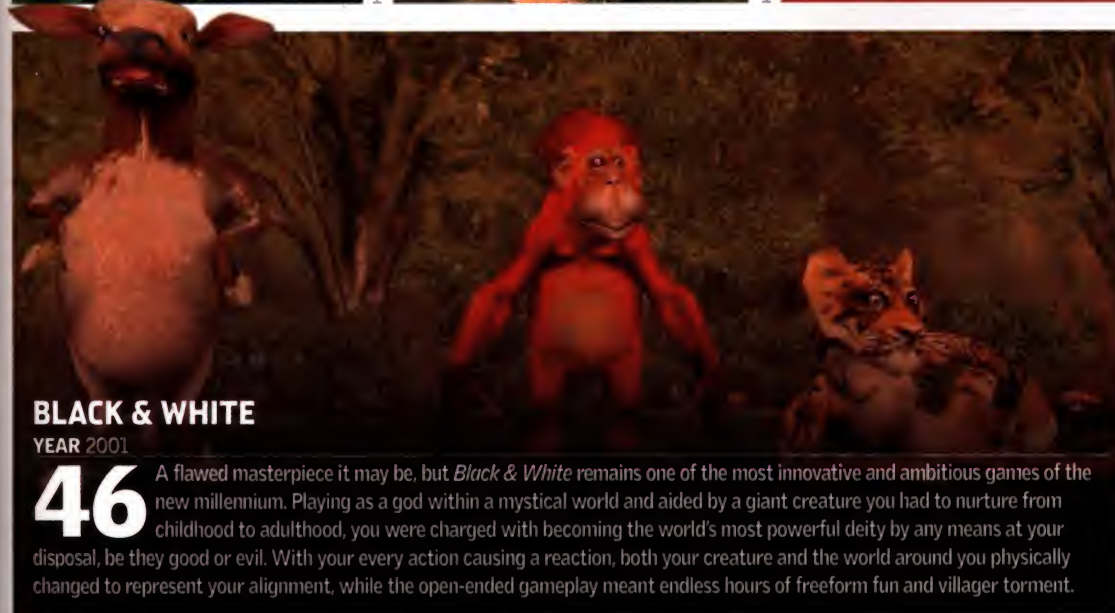
44 This superb sequel remains one of the most taxing and entertaining strategy games of times past. Controlling a squad of four elite soldiers, you used their unique skills of sabotage and clothes-nicking to solve vexing puzzles while stealthing your way behind the sumptuous-looking enemy lines of Nazi Germany.



COMMAND & CONQUER

YEAR 1995

42 While not quite the first RTS, *Conquer & Conquer* was the game that turned the genre into a global phenomenon. Suddenly, turn-based gaming was a thing of the past as gamers across the world experienced the joys of real-time warfare. Packed with cool and imaginative hardware – most notably the still unsurpassed Mammoth tank – and driven forward by superbly acted FMVs and one the best RTS soundtracks ever, *C&C* heralded a new dawn in PC gaming and would go on to influence such classics as *Company Of Heroes* and the *Total War* series. Now that's what we call a legacy.



BLACK & WHITE

YEAR 2001

46 A flawed masterpiece it may be, but *Black & White* remains one of the most innovative and ambitious games of the new millennium. Playing as a god within a mystical world and aided by a giant creature you had to nurture from childhood to adulthood, you were charged with becoming the world's most powerful deity by any means at your disposal, be they good or evil. With your every action causing a reaction, both your creature and the world around you physically changed to represent your alignment, while the open-ended gameplay meant endless hours of freeform fun and villager torment.

QUAKE

YEAR 1996

41 Having changed the world of PC gaming forever with the all-conquering likes of *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom*, id Software then went and made it three hit series in a row with this stunning medieval-fantasy-meets-sci-fi blaster. A dearth of story was made up for with giant electro-sloths, eerie murk and brutal multiplayer.



101 BEST GAMES EVER



DUKE NUKEM 3D

YEAR 1996

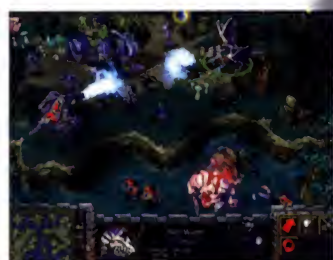
40 A woman shouldn't be alone in a bar like this. She's interested, that's for sure. No matter how fast you strafe around her, she's facing you. Your hopes raised, you try to catch her attention with a dollar bill. "Shake it, baby," you growl, before renting a porn movie and going home alone.



WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

YEAR 2002

39 Two years before the freakish popularity of *World Of Warcraft*, there was the only slightly less freakish popularity of *Warcraft III*. Ushering in the Night Elf and Undead races, it fleshed out the world and packed it with more of that compulsive Blizzard gameplay.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIM 2007

YEAR 2006

38 Think non-combat flight sims are tedious? Then shut up. Microsoft have this genre sewn up, and even if *MFS07* is, ahem, 'Vista Preferred', it still hurls more fun, technology and innovation into the genre than ever, with missions that even include spies. Still think it's for dads, eh? Even with spies?



SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

YEAR 1993

37 The new games are great, but they wouldn't have been made if the LucasArts original hadn't earned an immortal sheen. The comic-book roots were clear – every click was a joke, and sophisticated enough to not even feel like it was trying that hard. The 'Bigfoot' storyline wasn't quite as memorable as that of *Monkey Island*, but some of its scenes will live forever: the Cone of Tragedy, Gator Golf, bungee jumping from the noses of Mt Rushmore... And did you know the world's largest ball of twine is actually in Wisconsin? Well it is. That's a true story.

PSYCHONAUTS

YEAR 2005

36 *Psychonauts* was Tim 'Grim Fandango' Schafer's first departure from point-and-click games, and he managed to fill the world of platform puzzling with his rich comic imagination. Artistically beautiful without the modern cop-out of being state-of-the-art, *Psychonauts* has some of the most innovative level design around.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: 1946

YEAR 2006

35 When *IL-2 Sturmovik* was first released, it was already a great flight sim – perhaps the greatest. Since then, its creator Oleg Maddox has continued to update and expand *IL-2* until it's damn near perfect. The new 1946 version is 100% refined pure flight-action goodness. Proof that history (not to mention flight sims) can be fun.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

YEAR 2006

34 With goals creating the kind of rush previously reserved for non-prescription drugs, Konami's latest arcade kickabout is still the pinnacle of the genre, however much *FIFA* is catching up. As in real football, however, violent disputes and foul language tend to follow it wherever it goes.



BATTLEFIELD 1942

YEAR 2002

33 Get in tank, shoot something, get out of tank, run around, shoot something. That's the pleasure of *Battlefield 1942*, and why it's more instant fun than the strategically superior sequels. It not only invented a whole genre from scratch (*Codename Eagle* aside), but also made crashing into a hillside in a freshly taken-off plane seem hilarious.



"Describe *Mafia* as a *Grand Theft Auto* clone and you honestly should be sleeping with the fishes"



GTR 2

YEAR 2006

32 While not for the novice (first-timers probably won't get round the first corner), SimBin's hardcore racer is quite simply the finest racing simulation on Earth. With force-feedback that's so realistic it gave our managing editor travel sickness, slick hi-res graphics and obsessively accurate recreations of famous tracks and exotic machinery, *GTR2* is quite simply petrol-soaked delirium.



ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE

YEAR 1992

31 Boasting the first true free-roaming world, *Ultima VII* still hasn't been topped. It satirised Scientology, let you fish, mine and have sex; it also lay the foundations of the MMO, but you got to make a permanent impact on your world. Best of all, it's still playable via Exult (exult.sourceforge.net).



FAR CRY

YEAR 2004

30 *Far Cry*: punishing, intelligent, beautiful and shackled to a hero with a distinctly odd sense of fashion. Developers Crytek may pour scorn on their Trigen creations these days, but for long-range, heart-stopping combat and remarkable outdoor level design, their tropical shooter remains a ground-breaking FPS experience. It's also, however, extremely bloody bastard-difficult to complete.



WING COMMANDER IV: THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

YEAR 1995

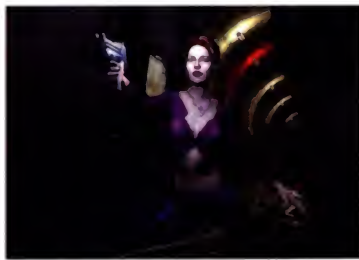
29 Beyond the orgy of million-dollar FMVs (this time abandoning blue screen for real sets) and the dumb thrill of having Luke Skywalker play your hero, *WC4* offered high-impact space battles, the likes of which are curiously uncommon in this day and age. Come back soon, *Wing Commander*. Please?



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

YEAR 2004

28 Troubled development, bugged-filled release and the closure of the development company. That would spell the end of most games, but not *Bloodlines*. It was so stupidly good anyway that the fans resurrected it themselves. Three years and 2.4 versions later, we still don't know which 'sister' we'd rather sleep with.



MAFIA

YEAR 2002

27 Describe *Mafia* as a *Grand Theft Auto* clone and you honestly should be sleeping with the fishes. This superb mobster game boasted a fantastic storyline that saw you rising to inevitable Don-hood, along with a considered approach to car theft, gunfights that felt real and a gut-wrench of a final scene. We're in desperate need of a sequel.



COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

YEAR 2004

26 It's the most popular online shooter ever, and the second place isn't even close. I mean, we know how to strafe around de_dust better than we know the route between the sofa and the bed in our own homes. Even if the recent introduction of market forces has rankled some players, the continued amount of love being pumped into the game from users and developers alike is remarkable. Will we ever tire of playing those same maps again and again, and being shot in the head from a mile off by someone whose skill infinitely outstrips our own? It's sadly doubtful.



DIABLO II

YEAR 2000

25 The dungeon crawler par excellence, *Diablo II* is for many still untopped in the realms of fantasy hack-and-slash. There's no denying the repetitive gameplay, but the devil of *Diablo* was in the intricate character stats – the bigger, better weapons and the endless quest for self-improvement. Add random generation, high production values and the marvel that was battle.net and you get a game that may never be surpassed.



CALL OF DUTY

YEAR 2003

24 More Nazis? Oh go on then... From developers split from the *MOH: Allied Assault* team came another title to raise the WWII shooter bar into the stratosphere. From aerial insertion into France to a dread-filled river crossing before the smoking ruins of Stalingrad, the tension rarely relented – and when it did you'd usually been killed.



BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN

YEAR 2000

23 From the RPG masters at BioWare, *BGII* truly felt as if you were living an adventure through a real world. Romance, deceit, your own stronghold digs and weighty decision-making were just as important as stabbing vampires in the heart. There was so much detail that it just boggled the mind.



STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

YEAR 2003

22 Here's what happens when RPG heroes BioWare raid George Lucas's cupboard: the best *Star Wars* game ever. Set thousands of years before Luke Skywalker was even a twinkle in Anakin's evil eyes, *KOTOR* was a sprawling RPG with fantastic characters (assassin droid HK-47 was unmissable) and genuinely intriguing missions. Persuade an escaped droid to return to the mourning widow who'd taken to humping him as a replacement for her dead husband, or tell her to stop being mental? The choice is yours! With a third act twist better than all the prequels combined, it was a meatbag-delighting work of art.



FALLOUT

YEAR 1997

21 A candidate for 'brownest game ever' (along with *Quake I and II*), *Fallout* was also an intricately written jaunt through sex, violence, drug addiction and hulking green mutants in a world where the bomb has dropped. Gripping storyline, strong characters and even a few Monty Python references if you looked hard enough...



EVE ONLINE

YEAR 2003

20 Deep down, every MMO feels the same – grind, level, repeat, move on. But not *EVE* – the first high-gloss persistent game world to truly live beyond the minds of its creators. With player corporations constantly battling it out both via diplomacy and the occasional space fracas, it's more like the real world than any MMO. Plus it's teh pretty.



QUAKE III: ARENA

YEAR 1999

19 id Software's greatest multiplayer frag-a-thon, yet to be matched in its sheer frenetic speed. *Unreal Tournament*'s varied environments and alt-fire modes made many new fans, but to the hardcore shooter fraternity, nothing matched *Quake III*'s unforgiving and brutal gameplay. Rule the railgun and rule the universe.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT

YEAR 2001

18 War isn't about pretty explosions, nor is it about regenerating health: it's about patience and getting killed from a very, very long way away. Like a grumpy-faced single-player *Battlefield* holding a tank manual, *Flashpoint* has trapped countless gamers in its cruel embrace. A legendary title.



"EVE Online was the first high-gloss persistent game-world to truly live beyond the minds of its creators"

PCZONE 101
BEST GAMES EVER

COMPANY OF HEROES

YEAR 2006

17 An epic WWII strategy game with incredible graphics, realistic physics and superb AI soldiers that find cover wherever they are in the dynamically destructive environments, *Company Of Heroes* is a rock-solid classic. When you've finally finished slaughtering the Nazi war machine in the story-driven single-player campaign, the multiplayer skirmish mode should keep you entrenched at your PC for months.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

YEAR 2004

15 So, according to official figures, you've got almost eight-and-a-half-million players paying £8.99 per month. So that's, let's see, 77 million quid a month. Cripes! Luckily, the experience justifies the global obsession, as *WOW* is beautiful, addictive and a genuinely wholesome experience (in game terms, if not life terms). It's also the first MMO to funnel in players from the true mainstream – a remarkable feat.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

YEAR 2006

13 Held below *Morrowind* after a populist revolt in the PC ZONE offices due to qualms with the levelling system and an enduring love for its predecessor, *Oblivion* is nevertheless an outright triumph. Beautiful, bold and endlessly inventive, it's one of the greatest fantasy RPGs of all time. From its first moments, it makes you kiss goodbye to any other waking thought.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

YEAR 2003

16 From the rewind whip sound bringing you back into real-time to the effortlessly cool film noir stylings and soundtrack, destruction has never been quite as satisfying as it was with *Payne*. A thrill-packed funhouse of violence and inventive design, it even contained a glimpse of Mona Sax's bare behind.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007

YEAR 2006

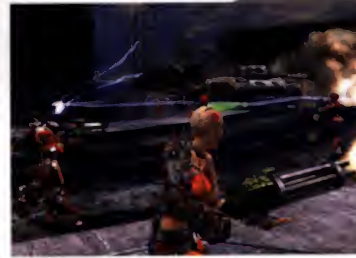
14 It may not have the eye-sizzling graphics of other titles, but few could deny a high-league placing for the addictive footy management series begun by the Collyers in 1992. Previously known as *Championship Manager*, *FM* is the closest most of us will get to being Jose Mourinho (thank god).



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

YEAR 2004

12 Featuring an arsenal of alt-fire weaponry (the Flak Cannon remains peerless), nimble vehicles, innovative multiplayer modes and excellent AI bots, *UT2004* is a violently colourful gib-splattering FPS classic and Epic's most complete shooter experience – at least until *UT3* lands on terra firma.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

YEAR 2003

11 "It should be *San Andreas*!" "Bollocks – how about the original *GTA*?" "F*** off. The first 3D *Grand Theft Auto* is the most genre-defining." The *GTA* series caused more trials and tribulations than any other in our top 101 discussions, but we eventually settled on *GTA: Vice City* as our choice of free-roaming adult playground. *Vice City* enjoyed some hilarious missions (trying to photograph a congressman in congress with porn star Candy Suxxx, for instance), a cast of Hollywood legends (Dennis Hopper and Ray Liotta), plus an unforgettable 1980s setting and soundtrack. Plus it wasn't too big, it wasn't too small: it was just right.

101 BEST GAMES EVER

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

YEAR 1990

10 They don't make 'em like this any more. You see, *Monkey Island* was funny. Be it the hilarious insult swordfighting or Threepwood screaming "Elaine!" Graduate-style as his beloved was about to marry the evil LeChuck, barely a single gag fell flat. The puzzles were great too. None of this 'find rusty key put in rusty lock' rubbish. Add in a cast of unforgettable characters (not least Stan the dodgy owner of a used-ship dealership), and an ending that involved a heavily shaken can of grog, and you get a game whose innate lovability will last forever. Plus Guybrush could hold his breath for ten whole minutes: now that's impressive.



BATTLEFIELD 2

YEAR 2005

09 Are you an online FPS? "Sir, yes sir!" Are you a frag-infested representation of modern warfare packed with infantry and vehicular combat? "Sir, yes sir!" Do you have boot-and-shoot, instantly playable (well, sometimes instantly playable) 64-player online wars between gruff military types? "Sir, yes sir!" Well, that's nice. Seeing as you've taken the precedent set by *BF1942*, then added decent tactics and squadplay – and on a good server are the pinnacle of drive, crash and shoot gameplay – you're in the PCZ elite list. "Sir! Thank you Sir!" Good, now go and jump around on an assault course or something...



DOOM

YEAR 1993

08 The opening chapter was free to download, and immediately it changed everything. It was single-minded, it was obsessed with keycards, it wouldn't let you look up and down. And yet it was absolutely bloody terrifying: the growl of a pinky, the distant flare of an imp readying a fireball. *Doom* provided the foundations of the shooter genre we know and love today, from its use of atmospheric sound and lighting all the way through to the omnipresent cult of the exploding barrel. As iconic today as ever it was, its success and its legions of fans have made it pretty much synonymous with the concept of PC gaming. Hooray for hell.



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

YEAR 1999

07 "Where am I? Why are the crew's innards smeared into cryptic sentences over the walls? What's that alarm saying? Compartment? Depressurising? Evacuate? Shit, what do I do now?" *System Shock 2* was packed with desperate moments like this. Masterfully designed, perfectly paced, fundamentally terrifying and, in Shodan, boasting the most ingeniously portrayed arch-villain ever to occupy a hard drive. *System Shock 2* is the ultimate in abject, lidless terror. If you've never played it, then dear god track down an (unforgivably rare) copy of the game. You'll thank us. After a fashion...



"System Shock 2 was masterfully designed and in Shodan, boasted the most ingenious arch-villain ever"

PCZONE 101
BEST GAMES EVER

ROME: TOTAL WAR

YEAR 2004

06

From the mists they emerge, marching like one beating drum in columns of red and gold. Arrows streak down from the darkening sky. Siege towers roll towards crumbling walls, their creaking wheels thunderclaps of doom.

Then, you fancy a cup of char, press escape and put the kettle on. *Rome: Total War* contains an inordinate amount of goodness – to label it as a mere military RTS would be an outright crime. History, technology, entertainment, unreliable drunken generals in your northern territories and heaps of bloody death make it the greatest PC game ever crafted in the British Isles. There's no strategically minded game studio that can currently match The Creative Assembly; *Medieval II: Total War* is good, but the grip of *Rome* will last as long as the civilisation it's based on. Or at least until the next game comes along.



HALF-LIFE

YEAR 1998

05

Half-Life was infused with genius. Even if you were grumpy enough to dismiss the superb level design and robust combat, Valve created an unprecedented sense of immersion. Starting with that monorail ride, the lack of cut-scenes and indirect style of exposition made you feel like part of the storyline in a fashion that was both effective and understated. The illusion of intelligence was just as cunning; hearing the marines talking about what to do, seeing them do it, then getting flushed out by a grenade was superb, and created a feeling that was never quite equalled in the sequel. Just one thing: forget about the last level in *Xen*. Someone had been playing *Crash Bandicoot* and got carried away.

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

YEAR 2002

04

Ooh, aren't we controversial? Yes, but constant bickering among the *PCZ* team has left the Vvardenfell lobby victorious. The argument runs thusly: *Morrowind* is a better game than *Oblivion*, if only for the things that Bethesda sacrificed in their pursuit of making the latter that bit more action-orientated. Consider that moment three hours into the game when you realise you've covered only a minute fraction of the map – the sheer scope of *Morrowind*'s world is breathtaking even by today's standards. It focused on creating a rich, deep back-story for every faction and race, and its lore and fantastically varied environments were more enjoyable to delve into than *Oblivion*'s. You were also more attached to your character and his role in the story. More practically, the taxi-like Silt Striders were infinitely better for RPG gameplay than the adventure-impeding Fast Travel feature, while the levelling system made you feel like you were actually getting progressively stronger and pushing further into the game's wilderness. The absence of voice-acting allowed characters to move beyond the somewhat restrictive vocal talents of *Oblivion*'s actors. In retrospect, the combat was pretty crap, but hell, we stuck with it regardless, and if that's not a measure of this game's brilliance we don't know what is.



CIVILIZATION IV

YEAR 2005

03

Looking deep inside the code of *Civ IV* would be the gaming equivalent of climbing inside the Total

Perspective Vortex from *The Hitchhiker's Guide* – so vast, complex and limitless in potential that your mind would be mulched instantly. Thankfully then, Sid Meier saw fit to nestle a beautiful interface over his creation – letting it feel like you'd got raw history ticking away beneath it all, but keeping it manageable and non-terrifying. From the very first selection of a decent place to settle to the point at which you first dropped the nuke (and all the pointy-sword squabbling in between), *Civilization* was so captivating that bedtime was always pushed into the wee small hours. You couldn't help but give human qualities to your AI opponents, analysing their movements and trying to see through their meaningless platitudes and offers of bananas in exchange for plutonium. There was just no other game that provided such feelings of glory or impending doom – all through one simple 'end turn' key-press to boot. And with *Civ IV*, well that's the iteration that just nailed everything: multiplayer, looks, religion, music, modding, engine, Leonard Nimoy... Everything.



HALF-LIFE 2

YEAR 2004

02

We gamers have become steeped in *Half-Life* – its engine, its *Counter-Strike* bedfellow, its sci-fi lore, its physics, its characters spreadeagled in humorous *Garry's Mod* poses, and the unexpected desktop disturbance that was Steam. Because of all this white noise, the fuzzy appendages of a game installed on countless hard drives worldwide, it's easy to forget just what made *Half-Life 2* (and its offspring *Episode One*) so damn special. For a start, it was one of very few games that developed true emotional attachment to its characters, through dialogue, remarkable facial animation and even the odd hug and kiss. Better yet, it allowed you to play a role in some 3D action set-pieces that wouldn't be out of place in the very best of Spielberg or Cameron; to be a part of a stunningly realised future-scape not a million miles away from the mind of George Orwell. It's fair to say that elements of *HL2* were slightly too in love with its own physics system; it's also fair to say the squad bits at the end were clunky – but these are flies in a jar of ointment the length and breadth of the North Sea. Valve's creation is, was and remains a vital stepping stone between the games we all love and the games our children will be playing in years to come...



"It was a page-turning interactive thriller, fulfilling every action-hero daydream in the big book of male insecurities"

PCZONE
101
BEST GAMES EVER

DEUS EX

YEAR 2000

01

Yes, *Deus Ex*. The greatest step the PC has ever made towards total immersion in plot, character and interactivity. A game that truly made you feel like star of the show – the fulcrum in a global conspiracy upon whom everything

hinged. It was a page-turning interactive thriller, fulfilling every action-hero daydream present in the big book of male insecurities. Hacking into mainframes without being detected, becoming a one-man killing machine as well as a creature of shadows and stealth, and turning on your cruel masters in support of the little man. Who wouldn't want to be the hero?

Deus Ex's plot was always in flux – it delighted in putting you on the spot. Do you put the bloody icing on the cake of your defection by filling Manderley with bullets, or do you walk out the bigger man? Do you protect your brother in his seedy hotel room as *Men In Black* start banging on the door, or do you start running? In your *Half-Lives* and *Dooms*, the bottom line was that you were playing a game. In *Deus Ex*, on the other hand, you were breathing a narrative that felt as if both it, and you, truly mattered.

There was some pure trickery too, points at which the game would pull the cybernetic rug from beneath you. Who can forget being shot like a dog on the street before waking up in the evil Majestic 12 base – and slowly realising you were beneath the familiar halls of UNATCO?

All this is nothing compared to the freedom *Deus Ex* forced on you: to use your own brain, think outside the box. Stranded on top of a building with next to no ammo and an enemy to one and all? Why not attempt to cushion your fall with cardboard boxes, jump down four stories, break your legs and crawl away at a painfully slow pace?

With its role-playing depth, its feeling of character ownership and countless ways to approach offing your foes, the fact we were never given a worthwhile sequel is among the greatest of gaming crimes. For sheer immersion, for so brilliantly disguising linearity, for convincing us that we were the centre of our own little universe and for giving us orange when we wanted lemon-lime, it's number one. We wear our sunglasses at night, and probably always will.



DEUS EX'S CREATOR WARREN SPECTOR ON BEING NO.1

"Our need to create something truly interactive – that got players 'off the rails' – drove us to solve all but impossible problems. There was a thrill, a feeling of being part of something special. Working on *DX* was gruelling and stressful, but none of us had a choice about it – we had to deliver the Game Of The Year – just making a good game wouldn't have been enough.

"It's incredibly gratifying to be recognised for your work. Winning more than 30 'Best Of' awards in 2001 was terrific. And hearing from players, as I still do, who've played the game numerous times is... Well, a little scary, but still cool! Having other developers tell me that *DX* changed the way they think about their work, and seeing games come along that were openly inspired by *DX*, now that's a great feeling.

"But, honestly, all the accolades pale before the experience of being part of the team that made *Deus Ex*. So, thanks to PC ZONE for recognising *DX* as a great game. But my deepest thanks go to the team that made it possible."

For the full unedited transcript of Warren's response to *Deus Ex*'s top-101 glory, visit www.pczone.co.uk



AGREE WITH OUR TOP 101? **VIOLENTLY DISAGREE?** FEEL A DESIRE TO RANT AT A GAME'S EXCLUSION? THEN JOIN THE DEBATE AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK OR FIRE OFF AN EMAIL TO LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK



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PCZONE

REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

NOOBS

DESPITE MY BEST efforts over the last eight years or so, my mum's only just discovering the joys of computing.

One Sunday night I receive a phone call from her "having problems with this stupid computer", and reluctantly take on the role of tech support. Managing to refrain from telling her to switch it off and on again, I ask what she's trying to do. She replies that she has two new emails but she can't find them to read. "Have you tried clicking on your inbox?" I ask. She explains that she has no idea what that is, but after a bit of direction, she finds it and manages to open both emails. "Oh, that's wonderful!" she exclaims. "I also need to get some figures from an email. Can I do that?" she asks. "Just print them out mum. See that big print button at the top of your screen? Press it." A few seconds pass, followed by: "Oh my god, it's coming out of my printer. Aren't computers good, that's amazing!"

Next thing you know, she'll be on the phone asking for advice on how to complete *Solitaire*. And that's just one slippery slope away from becoming a *WOW* addict....

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion

66 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION – SHIVERING ISLES

Oblivion's loony expansion is finally here...

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)

The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC ZONE gaming machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks XB1-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: www.xworksinteractive.com



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- Buy this little lot

PCZONE
SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
- To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

"You look
electrifying, dear."

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION - SHIVERING ISLES

Suzy Wallace wonders if she's ever going to survive, unless she gets a little crazy...

DEVELOPER Bethesda
PUBLISHER 2K Games

WEBSITE

www.elderscrolls.com/games/
shiveringisles/overview.htm

ETA Out now

PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

A slightly deranged expansion to the world's biggest offline RPG, with an entirely new and bonkers world to smite/cast spells and collect herbs in.

Minimum system requirements:

2GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV:
OBLIVION 95%

SHIVERING ISLES 87%

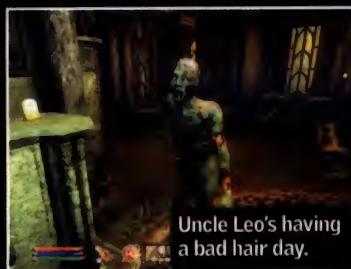
THE ELDER SCROLLS III:
MORROWIND - TRIBUNAL 80%

SO HERE I am, standing outside the curious-looking, double-faced entrance to the Shivering Isles. Having started at the nearest town, I jumped on the first horse I could find (which got me kicked out of the Mages Guild - whoops) and settled into a Daniel Radcliffe pose, hugging its neck as it paddled its way across Niben Bay to the small island in the middle. Before I enter through, I have a confession to make.

HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

When *Oblivion* was released, my social life went to pot. I wandered the world of Cyrodiil, picking off goblins and trolls with my sword and immolating mountain lions with my trusty fireball spell. I developed an unhealthy interest in botany as I journeyed to far-flung locations, scouring the land in order to complete my bizarre alchemical collection. I progressed quickly through the ranks of the Mages Guild, eventually becoming Archmage and moving into the complimentary pad at Arcane University. I travelled to every Daedra shrine on the map, garnering blessings and mysterious artefacts. I had a unicorn for a steed - at least until I drew out my weapon and it turned on me. Not happy with just the Archmage title, I also worked my way to the top of the Fighters Guild. As you can tell, I was completely hooked.

One thing I *did* neglect, however, was levelling-up. When the telltale arrow at the bottom of the screen indicated that I'd gone up a level and needed to sleep, I ploughed on regardless. When I eventually



Uncle Leo's having
a bad hair day.



Everyone's going green.

succumbed, I went up not one level but nine. Overnight, the world of Cyrodiil went from being my fantasy playground to a horrible nightmare. Bandits that were now dressed in glass armour seemed to revel in giving my character a beating with their glass weapons. I was forced to perfect a new style of combat, namely back-peddalling furiously while casting spells until my magicka ran dry.

Duly chastened, I began spending hours at the beach, scouring the sand for mud crabs to punch. I bounced around towns like some demented space hopper and cast hundreds of life detect spells while huddled in a town square, all in order to maximise my stats when I levelled-up. Shortly

afterwards, the strain on my time and senses became too much and I gave up playing altogether.

As such, it's with some trepidation that I stand here at the portal to the Shivering Isles. Once I cross the threshold, there's no turning back. Will I find myself being sucked in and losing contact with the real world again? Or, perhaps more worrying, will I be unable to attain that same level of immersion for a second time?

IT'S A MAD, MAD WORLD

Well, it's with some relief that I can confirm that Bethesda's addition to the Daedric realms has grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and shows no sign of letting go. Sorry friends/family/pets, but there's a realm to be saved.

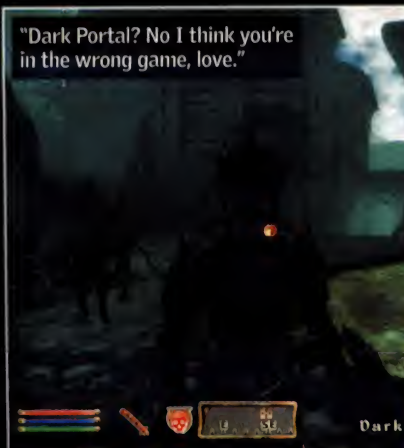
After stepping through the portal, I'm met not by a lush landscape as expected but a small sparse room containing nothing but a table and two chairs. A well-spoken, smartly dressed chap by the name of Haskill occupies the other seat. After he's greeted me and politely explained that I will soon be entering the realm of the mad god, my curious face turns to an amazed "ooh" as the far wall dissipates into a mass of butterflies. As the fragile creatures fly away, that in turn makes way for an "aaah". I'm still sitting at the bare table, but huge spiky mushrooms now tower above, framed by a stunning and colourful night sky. I spend the next few minutes just admiring the view. Oh yes *Oblivion*, I'm back.

Crossing into this realm has dropped me into an area known as The Fringe. This is

Skeletons *love* toasted marshmallows. Fact.



"Dark Portal? No I think you're in the wrong game, love."



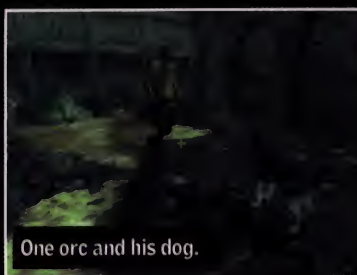
Let your skellie do the hard work.

where adventurers who've braved the portal collect (a bit like a dentist's waiting room), with those few blessed by the mad god Sheogorath allowed to pass through the Gates of Madness to the Shivering Isles proper. Those without permission are prevented from doing so by a particularly charming creation called the Gatekeeper, a behemoth made up of assorted body parts with the sole purpose of guarding the entrance to Sheogorath's realm. This is where my quest really begins in earnest.



Given this opportunity to flex their creative muscles, Bethesda's artists have really come up trumps

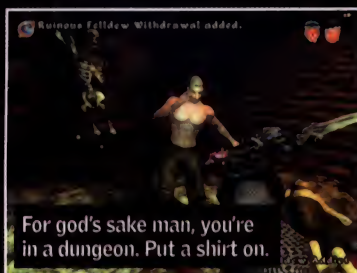
"Yeah, we've got a quest for you pal - go f*** yourself!"



One orc and his dog.



Nothing worse than an ugly baby...



For god's sake man, you're in a dungeon. Put a shirt on.

After a sneaky bit of scheming, eavesdropping and fighting, I eventually find a way through the gates. And upon walking out the other side, I'm instantly smiling like a loon. For though *Oblivion's* world was undeniably beautiful, after 80 hours or so I just couldn't help but get tired of the same familiar fortresses and wish for something a bit more... Well, dramatic.

Here, the land of the Shivering Isles is separated into two discrete and contrasting zones: Mania and Dementia. Given this opportunity to flex their creative muscles, Bethesda's designers and artists have really come up trumps. Mania's bright and colourful world is full of bizarre new plants and huge mushrooms that tower over the hills and valleys. Meanwhile, Dementia's low-lying land is covered in perpetual gloomy mists and is interspersed with

giant roots. In fact, this divide goes right through the land, including the twinned cities of Crucible and Bliss.

WORLDS APART

Bliss, the Mania side of the city, gleams in the sunlight and is filled to bursting with colourful flora and picturesque waterfalls. The scantily-clad Golden Saints patrol streets filled with cheery obsessives and compulsive creative-types and the city is ruled over by the Duke of Mania, a hedonistic druggie. One Redguard roams the streets, spouting useless bits of information such as how many minutes he spent sleeping last night and delirious beggars rub shoulders with self-conscious jugglers. A claustrophobic chap cowers in terror in the main square; speaking to him reveals that he's terrified of the walls falling in on him.

On the other hand, Crucible's streets are a different matter entirely. Even



Messing with the wrong guy

Think you can take on the mad god Sheogorath? Here's what happened to us...



Look at him, all smug with his throne. He doesn't exactly look tough in his regal finery. Mad god or not, I reckon I could have him.



Right, that's it, I'm sick of being his bitch. My new sword's not had any problems taking anything down so far. Have that!



Er, where am I? Is that land beneath me? Er, maybe that wasn't such a good idea after all. Hmm, I think I spy a nice soft landing spot...



Touch-down! OK, so maybe trying to kill a god wasn't the brightest of plans, but at least I wasn't the only one to have the same idea...



Morning aerobics proved popular.

during the day, what little sunlight penetrates to the streets is murky and barely illuminates the stagnant puddles, sewers and gloomy overhanging buildings. The citizens aren't much better, reflecting the darker side of madness. One woman's mutterings about Uncle Leo seem pretty innocuous until you sneak into her house and climb the stairs, only to be met with a tame zombie. Yep, you guessed it, that's Uncle Leo. The local tavern's run by Sickly Bernice, an eternally coughing and spluttering old woman who, if you listen to the rumours, should be avoided like the plague. Probably because she's carrying it.

The aggressive Dark Seducers keep control here and the city is presided over by the paranoid Duchess of Dementia. In a brilliantly sadistic mission later on, Duchess Syl makes you her inquisitor and hands over control of her chief torturer, with hilarious results. I know I was supposed to be finding out who was plotting against the Duchess, but I just couldn't help laughing as I instructed the torturer to dish out punishment after punishment to the unfortunate inhabitants.

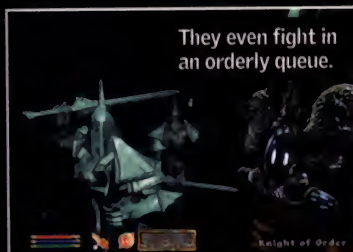
GOOD GOD, BAD GOD

Sheogorath, the mad god-king of the realm, is a regally outfitted but otherwise pretty normal-looking bloke with a beard. But as soon as his thick Scottish accent (well, Scottish-ish accent) begins to fill the air, it quickly becomes clear that he embodies every different type of madness going. Hilariously swinging between lavish praise, threatening to throttle me with my own intestines and talking about the smell of clowns in mere moments, he's definitely one of the highlights of the much stronger characters to be found in *Shivering Isles*.

Standing alongside his throne is his deadpan chamberlain Haskill (the one who admits you through the portal). The contrast between the deranged prince and the altogether too-sane Haskill provides some wonderful



I do hope that's not *real* grummite fur...



They even fight in an orderly queue.



The dog couldn't bear to watch.



Putting things in order

These forces of order are making a terrible mess...



Taking the place of the Oblivion Gates in *Shivering Isles* (but thankfully proving much quicker to dispose of) are the Order Obelisks. These crystalline structures spring up all around the Shivering Isles, with the forces of order using them to enter the madness realm. Tended by a Priest of Order and protected by the Knights of Order, you'll need to kill anyone protecting it, before placing the hearts of the do-gooders directly into the structure, overloading its power and eventually shutting it down. Which just goes to prove that sometimes everyone needs a little madness in their lives.

moments, though they're topped later in the game when Sheogorath grants you a spell to summon Haskill to your side for advice. He's the Daedric version of MS Word's paperclip if you will, only far less likely to provoke violent shouting. While the crazy prince thinks it's all a barrel of laughs and recommends summoning him at least three times a day, Haskill's deadpan and less-than-impressed responses could have come straight from a Zapp Brannigan/Kif Kroker moment in *Futurama*.

As the mad god eventually gets around to explaining, his realm is under threat from the Greymarch, a once-in-an-aeon event where Jyggalag, the Daedric prince of order, and his Knights Of Order invade and destroy huge swathes of the Shivering Isles. Sheogorath's pretty keen to prevent this and enlists your help, sending you on various tasks around the realm in order to help out and occasionally making you choose between the different sides of madness. I won't reveal any more of the plot, but rest assured that the main set of missions is pretty lengthy (around 30 hours in total) and features a wealth of innovative and amusing quests. These include fixing and taking control of Xedilian, a dungeon designed to lure in unwanted visitors before sending them insane via a series of booby-trapped rooms (a clear homage to *Dungeon Keeper*), as well as reassembling the Gatekeeper from a pick 'n' mix selection of body parts.

The latter is particularly rewarding, as you then get to watch him unleash his new powers on a group of plucky but doomed adventurers.



There's a bunch of bizarrely inventive side quests too, from a ruined fortress populated by ghosts who are doomed to repeat their last, unsuccessful defence for all eternity, to citizens who are too afraid to commit suicide. One of Bliss's resident lizard-men asked me to seek out the Fork of Horripilation, which he insists sings to him. After retrieving the unremarkable-looking fork for him, I discover that his entire house is dedicated to the humble eating utensil. One room's centrepiece is a large statue holding a pitchfork, while cupboards lining the walls are all packed to the brim with forks of different kinds and yet more sit in locked display cases.

MAD DOGS

While I often found myself seeking quests and restocking supplies in the twinned cities, there's no lack of opportunities to wander the surrounding countryside. Even the dungeons are different in this kooky land, being either dark stone dungeons, far more sinister than those in *Oblivion*, or subterranean root systems. The latter are entered through the bases of gigantic mushrooms and feature a dark and organic world where tangled roots criss-cross in front of you as barriers, brightly coloured flowers on the floor serve to warn of giant thorn traps and luminous mushrooms adorn the walls. They provide a hugely welcome change to the underground world of adventuring, although you'll no doubt

Grumpy old men

I know this is a 'role-playing' game, but please...



In case you're wondering just why I chose to play as a pasty-faced, sunken-eyed, ugly old man, that's not my original character. After my last session saw me get increasingly annoyed with *Oblivion's* levelling system, I frantically uninstalled the game and in my rage, accidentally deleted all of my savegames with it. Now technically, you can play through *Shivering Isles* with a brand-new character, but I couldn't face starting off with a crap sword and a measly fireball, so I began to beg workmates and freelancers for savegames. Luckily, freelance writer Sam Kieldsen came to the rescue (thanks Sam!), but my joy was short-lived as I loaded the savegame only to discover that my new character was one of the ugliest and most miserable-looking men I'd ever laid eyes on. I'm not sure quite why Sam went for that look, but though his name may be Armandere, I've grown to know him as Victor Meldrew and cap every fight off by exclaiming "I don't believe it!"

I couldn't help laughing as I instructed the torturer to dish out punishment after punishment to the inhabitants

find yourself getting lost at least once in their twisty corridors.

In keeping with the distinct themes, the monsters that inhabit each are also noticeably different and, bar the odd skeleton or man in robes, are unique to this unhinged realm. Mania's bright and beautiful countryside is patrolled by the insect-like Elytra with their shiny, multi-hued carapaces, Gnarlis that look like angry walking trees and the ugly-as-sin Hungers. Meanwhile, Dementia's swampy territories are patrolled by skinned hounds (which quickly made me realise the importance of the Dangerous Dogs Act), the dumb and ugly Grummits and the hulking great Scalons, which can turn invisible at will and are found in smaller form as the heel-nipping Balliwogs. My first Scalon encounter found me in the middle of some

murky swamp water when I noticed a telltale water ripple on the surface. Thinking I'd outwitted it, I drew my sword, prepared some spells and waited for it to draw closer, only to nearly fall out of my chair as it leapt at me from great distance, attempting to gouge my eyes out.

MENTAL CONTENT

Of course, there's a host of extra little bits and pieces thrown in too. If, like me, you're just an alchemist at heart, there are plenty of weird and wonderful new ingredients to add to your concoctions, including the oh-so-pleasant-sounding Letifer Orca Digestive Slime. Fancy new spells and sets of armour are also available, but the best thing you'll get your hands on is likely to be Duskfang/Dawnfang, a magical sword that levels up and gains abilities the more enemies it kills, before resetting itself to contrasting skills as dawn breaks or dusk falls.

What it all adds up to is a massive dollop of imaginative content. But it's not without its issues. For one, despite some gloriously inventive missions, *Shivering Isles* still features more than its fair share of tedious collecting tasks. Perhaps more annoying is that the choices you make in the main quest seem to have little



consequence on either the world or your character. Many seem to affect nothing more than which items you're offered - even making your way up to ruler of one of the cities doesn't change the way the residents react to you.

Anyone expecting any changes to gameplay will also be sorely disappointed. That means you can expect many NPCs to still sport ridiculously ugly faces and the same six voices, the controversial levelling system to remain unchanged and the inventory and menu systems to feel as clumsy as ever, with text that your gran could read - *without* the use of her glasses.

Despite these problems you'll rarely feel disappointed with *Shivering Isles*, as it's overflowing with creative vision and imagination, and features far stronger characters than you'll find anywhere in vanilla *Oblivion*. The split personality of the realm, strong storyline and welcome tongue-in-cheek humour offer a very different experience from *Oblivion* and one that all adventurers, perhaps even those slightly put off by the niggles in *Oblivion*, would be crazy not to try. **EW**

PCZONE

Graphics Lush fantasy world still looks great
Sound Same annoyingly catchy theme tune, voice-acting of varying quality
Multiplayer Not a chance

- ✓ Excellent split personality theme
- ✓ Much stronger characterisation
- ✓ Tons of new content, which means great value
- ✓ Some brilliantly inventive missions
- ✗ Some dull missions too
- ✗ Not enough consequences for your character

87

Mad for it



VIRTUA TENNIS 3



Jamie Sefton welcomes back the virtual tennis champion

DEVELOPER
Sega/Sumo Digital
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE
www.virtuatennis.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Sega's legendary *Virtua Tennis* series makes a match-winning return to the PC court, although the lack of online multiplayer is a major foot-fault.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6 **88%**

TIGER WOODS
PGA TOUR 2006 **85%**

VIRTUA TENNIS 3 **79%**

WITH THE KIND of euphoria that's screeched by numerous middle-aged ladies from Henman Hill during Wimbledon fortnight, we welcome back the third iteration to PC after *Virtua Tennis 2* failed to show. *Virtua Tennis* is the *Pro Evolution Soccer* of the sport, providing the instant accessibility of an arcade game, with the hidden depths and secrets of a hardcore title – the classic 'easy to learn, difficult to master' aesthetic that marks out true classics.

Virtua Tennis 3 gives you three types of shot – slice, top spin and lob – although the timing and the ability to 'charge up' shots allows you to pull off a huge array of different ones, which is where the skill of a master player is revealed. Like *PES*, Sega's sports game just feels right – you get real satisfaction when you hit a perfect return from a serve, or smash a crucial backhand into the corner to win a point, and the improved animation adds to the fluidity of the action.

In single-player, *VT3* has tons of variety, with 20 male and female tennis pros (but no Andy Murray), singles and

doubles games, tournaments and World Tour. Basically a hugely addictive RPG mode, in World Tour you can create your own tennis star and take part in compos and mini-games to build up your stats and buy better clothing, rackets and other gear.

STRANGE FRUIT

Also, you have instant access to over half-a-dozen 'court games' that include the bowling extravaganza Pin Crusher and my personal favourite Avalanche, a hilarious mini-game where your chosen tennis pro has to collect fruit that rolls down towards him, while dodging giant tennis balls. It's what I imagine Tim Henman's recurring nightmare about winning Wimbledon looks like.

All good, except for one very stupid omission – no online multiplayer. While you can gather friends around your PC with a couple of pads – which is ridiculous fun – there's no excuse for the lack of online when the ruddy Xbox 360 version has it. However, despite this balls-up, *Virtua Tennis 3* remains 26.9 times more entertaining than actually playing or watching the real sport. **PCZ**


PCZONE

Graphics Great animation and clean presentation
Sound Good ball sounds and grunts. Awful raaaaawk soundtrack
Multiplayer Yes, but no online

- ✓ Intuitive, fluid pick-up-and-play controls
- ✓ Excellent World Tour mode for longevity
- ✓ Funny and ridiculous mini-games
- ✗ No British talent
- ✗ No online multiplayer

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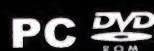
Match point



The strength to wield
the arcane arts...
...is all in YOUR mind

DAWN OF MAGIC

OUT APRIL 2007
[HTTP://DOM.DEEPSILVER.COM](http://dom.deepsilver.com)





BATTLEFRONT

Parents beware: hexually explicit strategy material ahead

DEVELOPER SSG

PUBLISHER Matrix Games

WEBSITE www.matrixgames.com/games/game.asp?gid=332

ETA Out now

PRICE £25.99

Min system req:

800MHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card



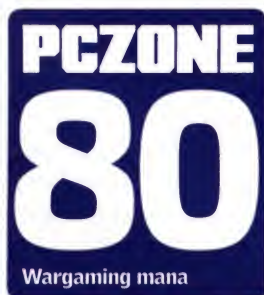
IN SOME, THERE still exists the urge to shunt large armies of tin soldiers around tabletop battlefields, while imagining they're called Erwin. The attraction of the pursuit is taking long hits off the bong of high-strategy. In said bong, *Battlefront* is the PC skunk of old-school turn-based wargames.

Simulating four WWII battles, you'll find all the hexagons, movement allowances, combat tables and supply matrices you could possibly want here. There are also sprawling maps, military diagrams and intensive research aplenty. But luckily, if you're attuned to the strategy hit, the elegantly chiselled game system ties it into something of a (pleasurable) overdose of hardest-core historical strategy – especially played by email.

The game comprises four battles from both the European and Pacific theatres, where hundreds of little square unit counters straddle often enormous maps. The pick of the bunch is the fascinating ruckus at Arnhem, of *A Bridge Too Far* fame. With other battles including the US assault of Saipan, land, air and sea power are all simulated, plus there's a cavalcade of variables to wrap your tactical cortex around.

We've slagged *BF's* previous outings before (Aussie developers SSG are one of the best indie WWII strategy developers). We were wrong. OK, for most, wrestling with *Battlefront's* sprawling intricacies will be an approximation of hell, but for some it will be strategy-bong heaven.

Steve O'Hagan



STACKED WITH DANIEL NEGREANU

Not poker-faced, just unimpressed

DEVELOPER Myelin

PUBLISHER Eidos

WEBSITE stacked.mtv.com

ETA Out now

PRICE £19.99

Min system req:

800MHz processor, 256MB RAM and 32MB graphics card



FROM THE OUTSET, *Stacked* feels pretty rudimentary.

Character selection is a matter of fat/thin, white/black, man/woman, with fat women conspicuous by their absence from the MTV-inspired selection of 18 character types. We have the technology, and one of very few options being 'Cap/Cap on backwards/No cap' seems pretty shoddy. Where's my top hat?

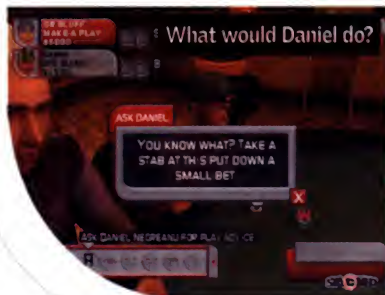
Moreover, *Stacked* only offers you one kind of poker; Texas Hold 'Em. There are plenty of games that offer you plenty more variety than that – most offer you a dozen variants. But *Stacked* is specific, and that's because it boasts university-programmed AI. AI that ain't all that hot.

Your guide, Daniel Negreanu, is on hand to offer advice at any time, and

he's your finest insight into the game's AI, given that you rarely get to see the other players' hands. It all seems by-the-book and ploddingly sensible, but when it's not real money and you're playing robots, that's pretty dull. The super-advanced AI claims to learn your style of play, but after many outrageous bluffs, I was well ahead with no-one looking to call me. I'd even called my character Dr Bluff...

Stacked does have a fairly solid online multiplayer system, which is where you'll get your challenging play. But the menus are too awkward – selecting a betting amount is fiddly beyond reason – and there's too much competition out there for *Stacked* to distinguish itself as anything other than one of the ugly clichés from its own character selection menu.

Jon Blyth





WAR FRONT: TURNING POINT

Richie Shoemaker finds himself stuck in a historical three-point turn

DEVELOPER Digital Reality
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE
www.war-front.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

A politically correct reconstruction of one of Adolf Hitler's wet dreams – all wrapped up in a cuddly RTS.

Minimum system requirements:
 2GHz processor; 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

COMPANY OF HEROES 93%

SUPREME COMMANDER 86%

WAR FRONT: TURNING POINT 65%

LIKE TV SHOWS about how crap we are at eating properly and keeping our houses clean (or hybrids thereof), World War II as a setting for RTS games has been done to death. Hence why the developers of this particular title offer up a more fanciful alt-history scenario, where us plucky Brits (helped by the Americans, lest they not be inspired to buy the game) must fight a guerrilla war against the occupying German forces in London.

Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Until you realise that far from being able to strap bombs to your brainwashed proles and have them run into cafés favoured by high-ranking Gestapo types, the way to wage such a desperately low-tech fightback is to build bases and churn out the usual formula of tanks, infantry and other ancillary units.

In short, apart from throwing in a fair few wacky units converted from steampunk, like ice-spitting Rooski tanks and jetpack-wearing Nazis, and wrapping the game in the counter-factual, *War*

Front is about as unique as a new series calling itself *How Clean Is Your Wife?*

In a nod to the mighty *Company Of Heroes*, *War Front* makes heavy use of hero units to make sure you focus your tactics. There are also similarities in the sense that blowing shit up can be a real feast for the eyes. The environments are colourful and detailed, and explosions come thick and fast too.

TEN YEARS OLDER

However, the graphics don't seem to have been scaled back too well for lesser machines – turn everything down to the minimum configuration, and it looks like a game from last century. Which, all things considered, is apt, because this whole 'what if' angle was covered far better and with more humour back in 1996 with *Red Alert*, albeit without the 3D graphics.

War Front certainly isn't a turd. The spoken lines are woeful, but in every other area it's a more than capable game, up there with any mid-table RTS of the past five years. Insatiable WWII diehards will surely have fun, while sci-fi fans will enjoy

the *Wolfenstein*-inspired unit roster, but I'd much rather play *COH* or *Supreme Commander*. After spending half an hour with *How Clean Is Your Wife?* that is. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Pretty, in a 'meh' kind of way. Looks shit on basic specs though
 Sound Terrible voice-acting
 Multiplayer Yes, and great fun

- ✓ Kooky units
- ✓ Made-up history is fun
- ✓ Always plenty going on
- ✗ Standard RTS mechanic
- ✗ Scrappy interface
- ✗ Make the voices stop

65

Wait for it to go budget



Like Eddie The Eagle – except not shit.

FREAK OUT: EXTREME FREERIDE

There is such thing
as a freeride

DEVELOPER Coldwood Interactive
PUBLISHER JoWood
WEBSITE www.freakout-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
1.8GHz processor, 256MB
RAM and a 64MB graphics card



IF YOUR IDEA of a good time is to pierce your nose, pull a beanie hat down over your bleached blond hair and listen to music where people moan in a nasal voice about how bad mom screwed them up, then you're going to have a blast with this game. And even if that's not you, you might like it too.

This is downhill skiing done in the EXTREME!!! style of *SSX Tricky* or the *Tony Hawk* games. Having bailed out of a hovering chopper at the top of a mountain, you zip down the slopes and, depending on the mode you've chosen, attempt to either pull off as many tricks as possible or simply get down in a speedy, smooth yet suitably daredevil fashion. Nailing the tricks – which include jumps, star collecting

and 'railing' along logs and ridges – eventually unlocks new clothing and equipment for your skier, not to mention more game modes and mountains to tame.

The visuals are functional rather than pretty, while the music is either of the type mentioned above or what Americans call 'electronica' – but neither are as bad as the controls if you're stuck with a keyboard: this is a game that cries out for a control pad.

Despite its ooh-look-at-my-white-dreadlocks-you-square attitude, there's nothing revolutionary here – but then who cares when you're barrelling down a hill at speed, pausing only to backflip, cross your skis and land on a log sideways?

Sam Kielsen



"Can you give me a push?"

PCZONE

71

Snow bad game



They've not bothered to touch the interface.

FRONTLINE: FIELDS OF THUNDER

Nothing to do with Tom Cruise

DEVELOPER Nival and N-Game studios
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE www.paradoxplaza.com/
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 128MB graphics card

THE BIGGEST TANK battle in history is the subject of this WWII RTS – Kursk, 1943, Russia. It was the moment when Hitler threw the lion's share of his best remaining Panzer divisions into a meat grinder, in a tired old rehash of previously successful Blitzkrieg tactics. Which is ironic, as this game is itself a tired old rehash of Blitzkrieg – the last RTS game from developers Nival.

Despite the mid-Russian setting, the terrain here feels mighty familiar. It's one of that veritable battalion of up-'n-at-'em RTSs that rushed through the gap that *Sudden Strike* punched in the market back in 2000. No resource gathering, reinforcements triggered by events, large-scale drag-and-drop battles. Mucho fiddling with

supply and repair units.

But to be fair, the format is essentially a good one, and despite the overwhelming déjà vu all these T34s and Panzer IVs cook up, *Frontline* is mildly entertaining. It's no challenge to master, and the on-screen armies do their damndest to put on a show, pyrotechnic explosions, rattling machine guns and tanks demolishing everything in their way.

The emphasis here is slightly more on realism, with all manner of armoured vehicles roaming the battlefield. But the end result feels as throw-away as do too many of these RTS clones, without any of the class that makes *Company Of Heroes* such a blast.

Steve O'Hagan



The shellshock of familiarity begins to set in.

PCZONE

55

Reminds of old comrades



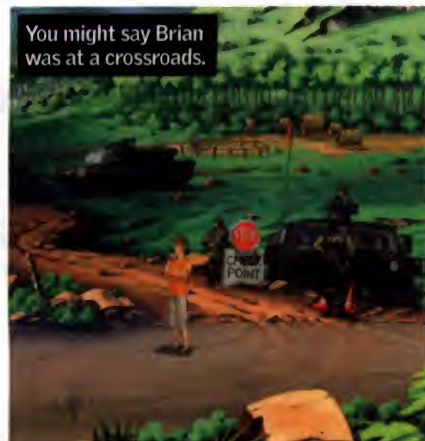
A lover of colder climates, Brian considered ending it all right there.



A rare moment of calm in the US Army.



Time to get the dog drunk...



You might say Brian was at a crossroads.

RUNAWAY 2: THE DREAM OF THE TURTLE

Dan Mayers had a dream of a turtle once, but he doesn't want to talk about it

DEVELOPER Pendulo Studios
PUBLISHER Ascaron/93 Games
WEBSITE
www.runaway-thegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Take Brian and Gina on a puzzle adventure from Hawaii to the Arctic. Amusing if you're a point-and-click veteran, or a surrealist able to think in mind-bendingly improbable ways.

Minimum system requirements:
 1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM
 and a 32MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PSYCHONAUTS 90%

SAM & MAX: EPISODE 5 83%

RUNAWAY 2: TDOTT 60%

BRIAN BASCO AND his beau, Gina (let's face it – not two of the most recognisable game characters ever) first appeared in 2003's *Runaway*, a half-decent adventure that revelled in its love of LucasArts point-and-click classics. Not content with one disappearing act, the couple are off again, this time a Hawaiian holiday prompting a global puzzle hunt.

With a crisp, clean and colourful art style, *Runaway* is a pretty game – which isn't a bad thing for a point-and-click adventure given the ungodly amount of time you'll spend staring at the screen and scratching your head over some logic-defying problem or other.

Actually, *Runaway* errs on the side of caution when it comes to mind-bending puzzles. Brian does a good job of helping out, providing decent prompts in the right places and taking short-cuts for items so you don't have to find every last nut, bolt or porcupine quill. But for every helpful hint, there's always a hidden hotspot that just doesn't want to be found, or a

collection of items that defy any sort of logic. This means you get stuck, and in a game that's supposed to be funny, being stuck is a bit of a problem.

PISSED-UP POOCH

As an example, at the start you need to distract a particularly aggressive monkey. Assuming you can find the robot dog with the leg-cocking function, you fill it full of whisky, put it where the monkey can see it, let the dog urinate and watch monkey lick it up. Monkey gets drunk, Brian strolls past.

Solve that puzzle quickly and it's funny. Kind of. But take more than ten minutes and any humour quickly flatlines – especially when the game compounds your frustrations by often making you do the same sequence twice. If only Pendulo Studios had taken inspiration from Telltale's games featuring a dog detective and hyperkinetic rabbitry-thing (see page 85).

Runaway undoubtedly has some decent moments and a pleasing graphic style, but a bit more attention to the

puzzles, the pace and the script, and this old-school adventure might have been more of a turtle's dream than a turtle's head. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Classic point-and-click, crisp and colourful
 Sound Europop theme tune
 Multiplayer Nein

- ✓ Varied locations
- ✓ Brian occasionally helpful
- ✓ Decent graphic style
- ✗ Tough puzzles can grate
- ✗ Mouse sweeping to find hotspots. Groan...
- ✗ Script loses something in translation from Spanish

60
 Not a runaway success



That's what happens when you leave the kettle on.

SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC

Be vewwy, vewwy quiet. *Dan Griliopoulos* is hunting 10,000-ton wabbits...

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Romania
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
silenthunter4.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Take your crew out into the Pacific to sing about rum, sodomy and the lash. Oh, and to torpedo cargo ships.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card

HOW IT STACKS

SILENT HUNTER III 83%

SILENT HUNTER 4 82%

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY 68%

THERE'S 10,000 TONS of ship sat in front of my sub's bow and I can't sink it. Not because I haven't the ammo, not because it's escorted by destroyers, and not because of a mutiny. It's because it's a passenger liner. So when I fire two torpedoes and it sinks in about ten seconds, leaving nothing but empty bobbing life-rafts, I feel guilty but my reputation has soared. I've just been rewarded for killing thousands of people. And we wonder why the *Daily Mail* hates videogames...

DOGS OF THE DITCH

Silent Hunter is another game that breeds war stories, the old guts-and-glory nonsense that Canderous spouted so hypnotically in *Knights Of The Old Republic*. You control a WWII submarine (*Silent Hunter III* was solely German WWII-based) in the Pacific rim, sinking Japanese ships from Pearl Harbour to the East China Sea.

However, if you've never played a *Silent Hunter* game before, you'll be confused by the tutorials. Your orders are communicated via radio messages, which are hidden at the screen's right. Sadly, the game hardly tells you the basics, so your first half hour is a

struggle – working out that firing is done with the space bar rather than the mouse, that zooming works with the tab and so on.

Once you get past that initial irritation, it's one of the best underwater games. It's more about management than action, but it combines the two slickly. Most of the time you're just sitting in your bridge, scanning the horizon, making sure the three shifts of your (scarily silent, dead-eyed) sailors aren't tired, that your boat isn't leaking, picking up the news, reporting on historical events and so on. If you're hardcore, you'll play it in real-time, but most of us mortals don't have four years to spare, so the ability to speed the game up to around 8,000 times normal helps.

Then you'll pick up a ship on radar or sonar and zero in on it, by drawing lines and circles on the map and doing complex maths, or by guessing. As you get closer, you'll drop beneath the waves, switch to the periscopes, slow the engine to a silent-running crawl and try to get a beam of the enemy to identify it. Then you'll wait and wait, and after an average of three days of hunting, you'll get a couple of violent minutes as your torpedoes strike the ship at the waterline. It's a wonderful mechanic, asking you to



Cargo, including planes, will topple off a sinking ship.

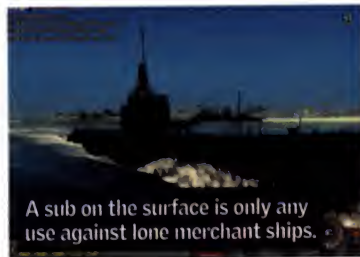


Real to real

What percentage is your reality?



Like the other *Silent Hunters* before it, *Wolves* allows you to tweak the realism settings to your own preferences. You can alter the fuel, air, CO2 build-up, battery, ammunition, crew tiredness, use of external cameras and many other settings. The most challenging settings are changing from standard AI-guided torpedoes, where you just select your target and can check out its path on the attack map, to the completely manual settings where you have to use a ship recognition manual to identify your target's height. From that, you determine how far away it is and how fast it's moving, and set the clockwork on the gyroscope so that the torpedo travels in the right curve and explodes at the right moment. We think there are probably about ten people in the world who can do that with any degree of accuracy, and they probably all work in theoretical physics. We'll stick to our 50% reality setting, thank you very much.



display tactical nous and massive amounts of patience in return for a blast of excitement.

PUPPIES OF THE PUDDLE

Once you run out of ammo, or your ship's damaged (your ship is horribly fragile), or you complete your mission, you'll be sent back to base to restock. There, you can spend your renown (based on the tonnage you've sunk) on recruiting better crews, upgrading your sub's armament or even buying a new sub. Then it's back out into the seas, to send more innocents to Davy Jones' Locker.

There's a historical mission mode included now too, which allows you to take part in 15 classic battles, plus wolfpack (co-op) and versus modes have also returned. There are flaws though: the game really shouldn't have made it past Ubisoft's QA with its stability issues and annoying bugs, it auto-slows when ships or planes are detected, the crew look like extras from a vampire film and it's not always clear how to do things. That said, if you're looking for a challenge and you fancy a rotting tub full of seamen, then this is das best aboot. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics Shipshape but no anti-aliasing
Sound Devastatingly naval
Multiplayer Co-op and versus

- ✓ Superb simulation that's mechanically perfect
- ✓ Beautiful seascapes and ships to titillate the eye
- ✓ Simple but addictive management formula
- ✗ Resource hungry, slightly buggy
- ✗ Difficult to get into, the navy

82

Sub-lime



CLOSE COMBAT: CROSS OF IRON

Classic casualty back from the dead

DEVELOPER CSO Simtek

PUBLISHER Matrix Games

WEBSITE www.matrixgames.com/games/game.asp?gid=335

ETA Out now

PRICE £20.99

Min system req:

1.3GHz processor, 32MB RAM and a 1MB graphics card



THE *CLOSE COMBAT* series has had such a long and intricate history, it's surprising BBC4 hasn't made a long and portentous seven-part documentary about it.

If it did, the *Radio Times* would say: "Back in 1996, Microsoft released *Close Combat*, the flagship WWII RTS to help establish it as a games publisher. It was small-scale and intensely realistic, recreating the chaos and thunder of battle down to the last bullet, grenade and scream. But not Hollywood enough for your mainstream audience, four sequels later the series drew its last breath."

But no. Thriving among the modders and hardcore strategy players who decried it the best RTS ever – WWII or otherwise – *Close Combat* clung to life. And now the beaverish CC community has helped brush up and re-release one

of the better titles in the series: 1999's *Close Combat III*. OK, so on one level this is an eight-year-old game shipped out as if new. The missions, units and historical data might be different, but the graphics and overall feel are dated, without doubt.

Bit of a con? Well, yes and no. See, the point is that this is still the best WWII RTS out there, for historical accuracy and hard-nosed squad tactics, hands down. And in multiplayer at least (the main focus of this update), it's one of the most gripping. Sure, the emphasis on tactics and cover etc make it slower than today's bells-and-whistles RTSs, but the time you get to think makes it one of the cleverest. Some games just don't seem to get tired with age. Chess and *Close Combat* are among them.

Steve O'Hagan



PCZONE

78

So old, but so good



Experience a new dimension in online poker

This is online poker like you've never seen it before.

Incredibly realistic, deeply immersive – PKR puts you in the heart of the action with mind blowing 3D graphics.

But we're more than just a pretty face. PKR goes deep with features and innovations like infinitely customisable characters and Emote Controls that are designed to change the way online poker is played forever.





"The future of
online poker is
here..."
Poker Player

"Online poker is
about to take a
giant step
forward"
Inside Poker



"It rocks!"
FHM

www.pkr.com



BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2007

Leather on willow on PC

DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.codemasters.co.uk/brianlara2007
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card

THE GAMING WORLD'S second most popular Lara returns to the crease, and *BLIC07* certainly makes a good opening impression by flaunting its real-world tournaments (the ICC Champion's Trophy and World Cup), accurate player likenesses and commentary from the likes of Gower and Greig.

It's also one of the prettier cricket titles out there, at least when it comes to animations – when Freddie Flintoff rubs his arm after receiving a 'wayward' Brett Lee thunderbolt, you find yourself wincing along with the bestubbed porker.

But once you start playing, things start to look rather less dazzling. First, it feels like the controls were designed

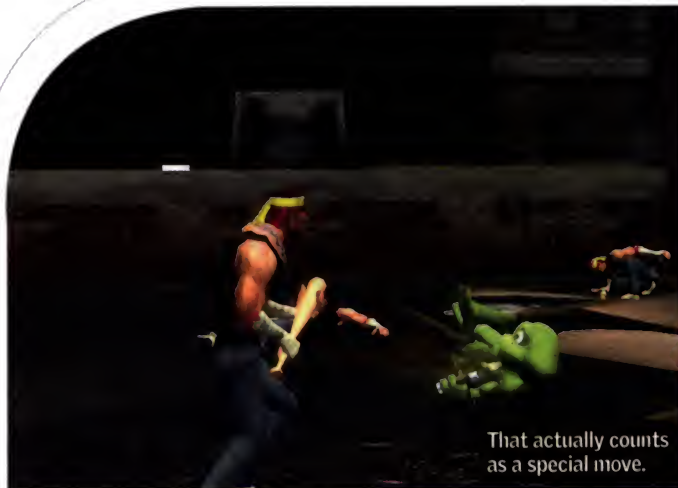
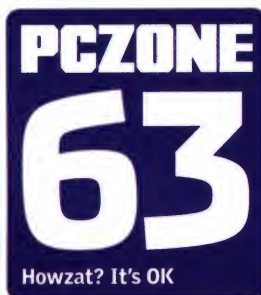
with the console versions in mind, then shoehorned into a mouse/keyboard mode – the keys are all over the place.

The camera angles could be better too. Too often, you find yourself dropping catches you'd expect a five-year-old with no fingers to make, because you couldn't predict when you should be readying your 'catch' button.

Helpfully, the AI does its best to balance things out by inexplicably missing simple catches and placing fielders in silly positions, so racking up a bunch of fours and sixes is actually pretty undemanding.

Maybe I'm being a little tough on *BLIC07* – it's a reasonably effective swing at a cricket game, with a nice range of shot and bowling types, which suggests that it might find its mark in the multiplayer sector. But if you're expecting a spot-on simulation of the sport, you'll find yourself stumped.

Sam Kieldsen



TMNT

Shell out for the gymnastic testudines

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE tmntgame.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card

THIS TURTLE GAME – you'll forgive me for not calling it *TMNT*, but I try to avoid sounding like an arsehole wherever possible – isn't very good. A lack of mouse support is to be expected of a game without camera control, but no joypad support on a title designed for console is plain mean-spiritedness. Playing this turtle game feels like getting told off for something you didn't really do.

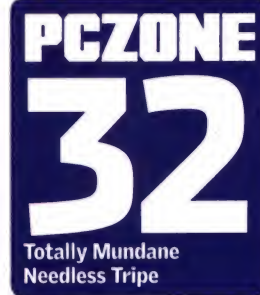
To its credit, it adds a good slice of speed to the 'Prince Of Tomb Raider' genre. Hanging from ledges, wall-running, all that stuff is here in speedy, repetitive abundance, punctuated by occasional fight screens where you'll tap Z and X without skill, and win without effort. There are no combos; just a chain that's lazily set off by tapping Z. You just can't call it fun.

Nice shoulder pads, Joan Collins.

Quick tip: if you must play, don't use the cursor keys. I found problems on two computers with simultaneously moving diagonally and jumping. It would have been a welcome difficulty boost to a far-too-easy game, if it hadn't made it virtually unplayable. Luckily, after playing a quarter of the game, I found a (non-customisable) alternate layout on the keypad.

It's for kids, and that's fine. But children deserve better. Get them a version they can actually control. Better still, get your beloved sprogs a game that won't decay their minds through dumb repetition.

Jon Blyth





ANKH: HEART OF OSIRIS

Jon Blyth clicked on a Sphinx, and its nose fell off

DEVELOPER Deck 13
Interactive Studios
PUBLISHER Xider Games
WEBSITE
www.ankh-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

If *Sam & Max* is the *Airplane!* of point-and-clicks, then *Heart Of Osiris* is the *Maid In Manhattan*. They're both good films, so stop sneering.

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

SAM AND MAX: EPISODE 5 **83%**

ANKH: HEART OF OSIRIS **69%**

AL EMMO AND THE LOST DUTCHMAN'S MINE **63%**

GETTING GIVEN THIS game to review is like a dream come true. I'd already written the entire review in my head; I barely had to play the game. But then, I leafed through *ZONE's* review of the first *Ankh* title, and my heart seeped and sank when I saw that we'd already made a joke about *Ankh* rhyming with a rude word. So I abandoned my mucky essay, and decided to actually play the game.

Before talking about *Ankh* however, a massive round of applause to *Heart Of Osiris's* copy protection; a code-breaking set of concentric cardboard rings which – if used correctly – win you an essential item in the game. Essential to passing the first chapter, anyway. It's a fitting retro throwback, and instantly warms you to the game. If you've played the first game, there's plenty of recognisable faces to draw you back into the world of conniving Egyptian gods.

And certainly, 'warm' is the word. There's never a moment where you'll leap to your feet, strip yourself naked and press yourself against a window with a

reckless smear, but as part of the recent deluge of point-and-clicks, *Osiris* ranks fairly high.

With a family-friendly sense of humour that features the odd lol moment – and the occasionally toe-curling moment that comes from trying a touch too hard, and perhaps from being translated – *Ankh* benefits from genuinely likeable characters who don't have really, really, annoying voices. It's amazing how rare this is.

CLICKETY-CLICK

Sometimes the puzzles don't make themselves obvious – a man complaining about a draught was placated with groovy music. Also clicking on things – important in a point-and-click – seems a little fussy when it comes to using things from your inventory on world items. However, you tend to have all the time in the world, so it's just an irritant, rather than fatal to the game. Sadly, it just breaks that lovely bubble every so often.

Heart Of Osiris won't convert adventure-haters in the way the polished charms of *Sam & Max* might, but it's more

than good enough if you're willing to take off your jaded hat for long enough to combine some crazy crap in your inventories. Oh, and it still rhymes with wank. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Not as state-of-the-art as the press releases imply
Sound Decent voice-acting, thank Ibis
Multiplayer No, not never

- ✓ Good puzzles and story
- ✓ Likeable characters
- ✓ Treading old ground happily enough
- ✗ Breaking absolutely no new ground
- ✗ Clicking sometimes misses

69

Cheeky name, cheeky score



"Fly my pretties, fetch me blood!"

Watching a blood-sucking Resource Collector's sac fill up is a strangely alluring sight...

The lines of battle have been drawn.

Friendly factions are always up for some trade.

GENESIS RISING: THE UNIVERSAL CRUSADE

Richie Shoemaker is a bloody marvel – just like this...

DEVELOPER Metamorf Studios
PUBLISHER JoWood Productions
WEBSITE
www.genesisrisinggame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29



AT A GLANCE...

Kinda weird-lookin' RTS with fleshy ships that run on blood. Tasty.

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

GENOSIS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT 81%
HOMEWORLD 2 81%
GENESIS RISING 79%

CLARET IS NOT something you readily associate with spaceship games. Typically, a ship will get shot with particle torpedoes or some such, and it eventually blows up in a powdery puff of neutron jibber-jabbers. What you don't expect to see is the thousands of crew-members explode in a firework of entrails and haemoglobin.

In *Genesis Rising* you see just that. Well, at least blood and lots of it – enough to stir militant haemophiliacs to rage against the symbolic waste. Colour-blind gamers will frequently wonder why everything's gone green and were the game ever to be released in Germany in censored form, all the box would contain is a note of apology.

Why *Genesis* is so bloody is easily explained by the fact that all the ships, from fighters and harvesters to the motherships and stations, require the red stuff to run. It's a slightly silly premise, but a fun one. Ships are grown (built), they can mutate (be upgraded) and blood is the raw material used in all transactions thereof. Where the game deviates from RTS tradition is that blood can be sucked from freshly deceased vessels to heal your fleet. Clearly in the distant future, HIV is no longer a problem.

As unhinged and as incomprehensibly silly as the game might appear to sci-fi traditionalists, *Genesis Rising* is actually a very simple game to get to grips with. It's also rather sedate.

BULLET TIME

Unlike the swooping cinematics of *Homeworld*, the ships in *Genesis* tend to amble along and, when ready to fire, pretty much sit there and let rip with missiles, lasers and other generic ordinance. Battles play out almost like real-time card-game battles, because as an enemy ship raises a shield to counter projectiles, you must consciously switch to beams, change targets or raise some counter.

What's more, you can't tell what a ship will be packing all the time, as genes (fittings, essentially) can be switched between ships, even during battle. Each gene not only offers some special ability, bonus or weapon, but alters the appearance of the ships as well.

Tactically, the game lacks in being played across a 2D plane,



The god delusion

Ask and ye shall receive...



While not overtly one that might get the backs up of those who hold a more fundamentalist belief in the supernatural, the storyline in *Genesis Rising* is one that clearly wants to question the means and ends of how myth is often subverted into religious dogma in order to perpetuate the authority of the ruling elite. That's my view anyway. It's also about killing aliens.



A rather angry spacestation.



Look closely, and you can see Santa.



It's big, it's blue and it's coming for you.

and doesn't have the tense micro-management of a game like *Nexus* (which is brilliant – if you're a space fan, get a copy). However, it makes up for it with the adaptability of the ships themselves.

PUT THE NEEDLE IN IT

Obviously, *Genesis Rising* has a unique look about it, one you'll probably have made your mind up about already. If you like what you see on page, you won't be disappointed by what's on-screen. Watching a blood-sucking Resource Collector's sac fill up as it draws fluids from victims is strangely alluring. Rarely though do the ships have any kind of animations on them, which they would have benefited from. The game isn't as static as it may seem though; CG cut-scenes and really rather good in-engine characters often pop up in the single-player campaign, offering various dialogue choices and chances for trade or aid. The developers certainly didn't skimp on the art budget – which may explain the recent worldwide shortage of red crayons.

Personally, I haven't enjoyed an RTS this much in a long time, not because it's spectacularly unique on a gameplay level, but because it has an aesthetic that's just so different from the pervasive goblin-WWII axis of RTS games. That *Genesis Rising* can lay serious claim to being the bloodiest game of all time is inconsequential. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics It's not *Star Wars*
Sound Top music & bangs
Multiplayer Standard issue deathmatch

- ✓ Those visuals
- ✓ Blood-sucking ships
- ✓ A storyline for atheists
- ✓ Adaptable organic units
- ✗ Perhaps not 'swoopy, weeeow dakka-dakka, take that Imperial scum' enough

79

Bloody marvellous



SAM AND MAX: EPISODE 5 – REALITY 2.0

Even better than the real thing...

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER GameTap
WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com/samandmax
ETA Out now
PRICE \$9 (£5) per episode, \$34.95 (£19) for all six

Min system req:
1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 32MB graphics card



IF THERE'S ANY LINGERING complaint about the first four *Sam & Max* episodes – apart from the minor let-down of chapter three – it was the repetition in *Straight Street*. Four episodes passed, with the same responses to the same clicks. It wouldn't have been an issue if the adventure wasn't episodic, but coming back a month later to the same jokes felt deflatingly anti-climactic.

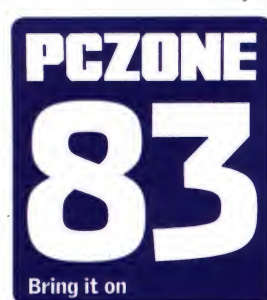
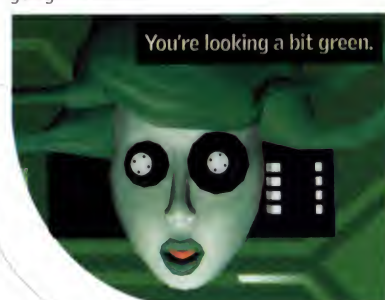
Not this time. Not only is *Reality 2.0* the finest episode yet in terms of visual creativity, slick scripting and pure fun, every response to every item has been changed. It's like going to bed with clean sheets, and squirming around because you'd forgotten how great going to bed was.

It's also the funniest episode, with good new characters – even the chit-chat feels sharper than before. And that's before you even get into the *Reality 2.0* of the title. It's a parallel universe run by the Internet, and it's a mix of *Tron*, *Mario*, *Final Fantasy* and *Dungeons & Dragons*. Needless to say, you'll be spending time in there.

If I'm forced to complain about something, some of the sound files slip into lower quality, but after the happy four hours I just spent with those boys, even mentioning that feels like a betrayal.

If the climax is anywhere near as good as this build-up, then *Sam & Max* will have honoured their proud heritage. No pressure then, guys.

Jon Blyth





THE SIMS LIFE STORIES

Because regular *Sims* is just too damn confusing

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 32MB graphics card

ONE OF THE most popular game ever made, *The Sims 2* is particularly loved by those not usually found buying PC games.

So it makes sense to assume that it's an accessible game, one that's easy to understand and simple to play. I've rarely, for example, ever been left wondering how to make a sim dance in a puddle of his own urine.

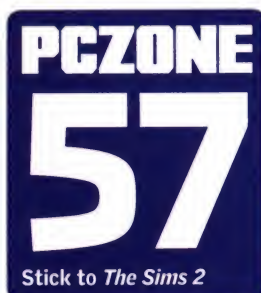
So where did *The Sims Life Stories* come from? It's a reworked version of *The Sims 2*, which strips away house-building and character-creation and adds a storyline to the life of a preset girl sim called Riley. Your sim has a single goal (be it seducing a man or trying on a new outfit) which changes throughout the story. Once you achieve a goal, the story moves on a bit.

This would actually be fun if the story wasn't so bland. I can't tell if



this is genuinely low-grade processed *Home And Away* offal, or whether it's so post-modern it's simply spewing ironic soap meta-humour out of every dialogue box. Had *Life Stories* (which contains two life stories and a threat to release more) been a little more mature in its scripting, I might have even recommended this. As it is, your mum would find it patronising.

Steve Hogarty



THE SIMS 2: SEASONS

Seasons for no reasons

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 32MB graphics card

BACK WHEN WE reviewed the last Christmas-themed expansion for *The Sims 2*, you may have noticed a screenshot showing some decorative reindeer in some snow.

Well, that wasn't snow, it was actually just sand flooring I'd found in the build menu. It looked a bit like snow, but it wasn't. It was a secret I was prepared to take to my grave, but now that *The Sims 2: Seasons* has arrived, I can safely admit my fraudulent ways and frolic in real virtual snow instead.

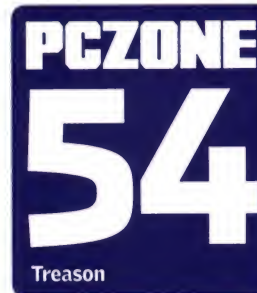
To say that *The Sims 2: Seasons* merely adds four different weather effects and switches between them at certain intervals would only be mostly accurate. It actually adds, as these expansions always seem to, a load of extra things vaguely related to the theme of seasons. This time it's gardening, and a special gardening



club you can join and have rate your garden. It's actually kind-of nice, with some decent new content such as new careers and actions, and all our nasty cynicism was gently eroded by the mere act of growing and tending to a tomato plant.

As far as *Sims* expansions go though, it's mediocre. I mean come on, it's bloody weather... And gardening. What's next? *The Sims 2: Picking Your Arse*? We can only hope.

Steve Hogarty



THE GENETIC EMPIRE HAS BEEN BORN.

GENESIS

RISING

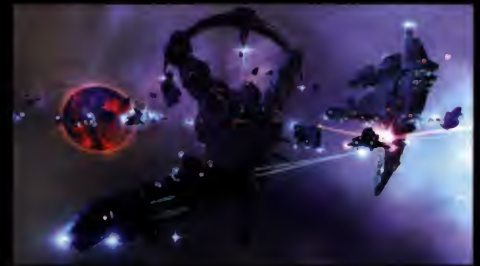
3000 YEARS IN THE FUTURE, THE HUMAN RACE DOMINATES THE UNIVERSE. WITH MASSIVE FLEETS OF ORGANIC STARSHIPS, GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOR WAR, HUMANITY SETS OUT TO CONQUER THE LAST REMAINING INDEPENDENT GALAXY.



Morph your armada in real-time with powerful upgrades.



Command massive fleets to conquer your enemies.



Single-player, Multiplayer and Co-operative game modes.



www.pegi.info



www.GenesisRisingGame.com

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You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

indiezone



"Down with the mega-corporations! All hail the independent developers!" shouts *Martin Korda* to nobody in particular...

MR ROBOT

THINK AN ISOMETRIC

RoboBlitz meets zany RPG-style combat and you won't be a million miles away from grasping what this superbly crafted game is all about.

Developed by the creators of the excellent *Starscape* (which only narrowly missed making it into our Top 5 indie chart), it's hardly surprising that *Mr Robot* is one of the most impressive pieces of indie programming we've seen in recent months.

You play as Asimov, a maintenance robot on a giant, malfunctioning starship, who must bring the systems back online in order to save his fellow droids and the slumbering crew.

This involves exploring numerous beautifully rendered locales and solving a myriad of fairly rudimentary but entertaining puzzles. You also get to engage in some quirky yet hugely enjoyable RPG-style combat that injects some serious cross-genre originality into the proceedings.

As if that wasn't enough, *Mr Robot* also features a host of upgrades and weapons, while the supporting cast is full of character and charm. The controls may not be the best, but aside from some fiddly jumps, there's little here to criticise. An absolute gem.

PCZONE
82

DEVELOPER Moonpod WEBSITE www.moonpod.com PRICE £14.95



Because robots need warmth too.

Where's Robocop when you need him?

INDIEZONE
GAME OF THE MONTH



Hands up who wants ice cream?

Look mum, no wires.

DETERMINANCE

DEVELOPER Mode 7 Games WEBSITE www.mode7games.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

THIS MULTIPLAYER AERIAL sword-duelling sim takes the rodent-swinging template of Mark Healey's superb beat 'em up *Rag Doll Kung Fu* and places it into a 3D world.

Controlling a flying warrior, you can take on either AI or human opponents in a wide variety of picturesque arenas. There's plenty here to warrant excitement, including some excellent weapon responsiveness, real-time blocking and countering plus the ability to hide and launch surprise attacks on your opponent.

As with *Rag Doll*, mastering the combat system takes a fair while, with early encounters spent mindlessly slashing at

your foe. Within a few hours though, you start to learn how to meld sweeping chops with subtle slashes and blocks, and that's when the fun really kicks in.

The flying element is a mixed bag though. It's impressive, but also severely restricts close-combat duelling, with many encounters often degenerating into a series of diving attacks at your opponent.

While it's not quite as must-have as it could have been, *Determinance* is certainly one of the most admirable indie combat sims yet, and with some patience and perseverance, you'll still find it hugely rewarding.

PCZONE
78

STARSHIP KINGDOM

DEVELOPER ApeZone WEBSITE www.apezon.com PRICE £11

IF THERE'S ONE type of game that the indie scene isn't short of (apart from *Space Invaders*, *Tetris* and *Arkanoid* clones of course), it's *Risk* copycats. However, while *Starship Kingdom* – a strategy game charting an interstellar conflict over the rulership of a star system – does base itself on this tried-and-tested turn-based template, it also attempts to inject it with some much-needed originality.

Proceedings get off to an awkward start thanks mainly to a hideously unwieldy interface and the absence of a tutorial. But, just as your finger begins

hovering above the uninstall icon, things suddenly improve.

As you master *Starship Kingdom*'s four turn phases – Deployment, Attack, Fortify and Upgrades – you begin to realise there's actually a fairly deep strategic experience to be enjoyed here.

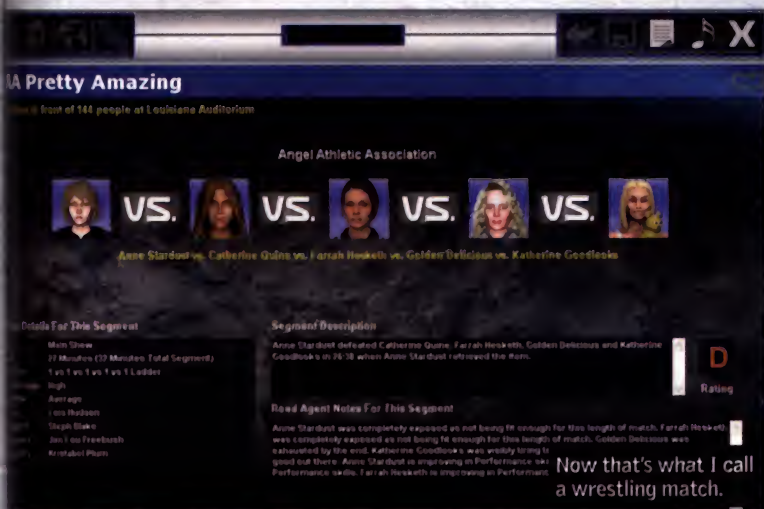
Thanks to some solid upgrade features and visually impressive real-time space battles, *Starship Kingdom* actually ends up being one of the better *Risk* clones currently doing the rounds. Which, given its poor start, is a mighty fine surprise.

PCZONE
71



TOTAL EXTREME WRESTLING 2007

DEV Grey Dog Software WEB www.greydogsoftware.com PRICE \$34.95 (£18)



IF THIS GAME were a grappler, it'd be the love-child of the Brooklyn Brawler and John Cena. No idea what that means? Then stop reading now, as this hardcore, massively detailed wrestling management game is definitely not for you.

Still with me? Good, because if you're going to even begin to enjoy *TEW2007*, you'll need a deep knowledge and even deeper love of the violent soap opera that is professional wrestling.

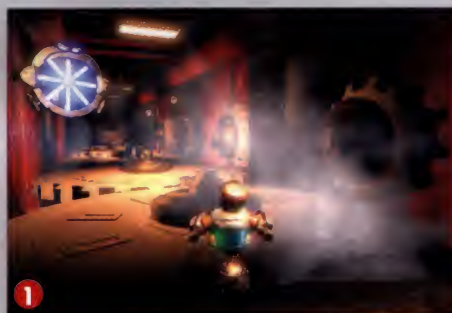
First, the good stuff. Taking control of a wrestling organisation, you must guide your stable of grapplers to international superstardom, fending off the competition to become the next WWE. Featuring a stunningly comprehensive wrestler database,

superb editing tools and incredibly detailed event options that allow you to fine-tune every facet of your live extravaganzas from storylines and feuds to titles runs and custom matches, *TEW2007* simply teems with possibilities.

Now for the bad news. The interface is so abysmal you'll want to tap out within minutes, while the lack of player guidance will make you want to take a steel chair to your monitor. Oh, and it's totally overpriced and the post-event feedback is rubbish. *Total Extreme Wrestling 2007* may be good, but it's not *that* good.

PCZONE
63

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



ROBOBLITZ

www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed Issue 177

This stunning third-person action-puzzler as a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates is the highest-scoring Indie Zone game we've ever had. Packed full of physics-based puzzles, excellent combat and jaw-dropping visuals thanks to Unreal Engine 3, you simply can't allow yourself to ignore this gem.



NAKED WAR

www.zee-3.com | Reviewed Issue 177

A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played via email in which your team of four soldiers kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.



MORNING'S WRATH

www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed Issue 163

A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



NEW STAR SOCCER 3

www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed Issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensi Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience currently available.



LUGARU: THE RABBIT'S FOOT

www.wolfire.com | Reviewed Issue 162

An ambitious and extremely entertaining third-person action/adventure in which you play a killer rabbit bent on revenge after his entire family is murdered. Inspired stuff.

BUDGET

Princes, devils and barbarians are all going cheap this month...

BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

OSTENSIBLY THE BEST of the *POP* series, yet distinctly unlikely to be remembered in years to come with the same wide-eyed fervour as its progenitor *The Sands Of Time*, *The Two Thrones* remains a fun, solid foray into everything our kid the prince does best.

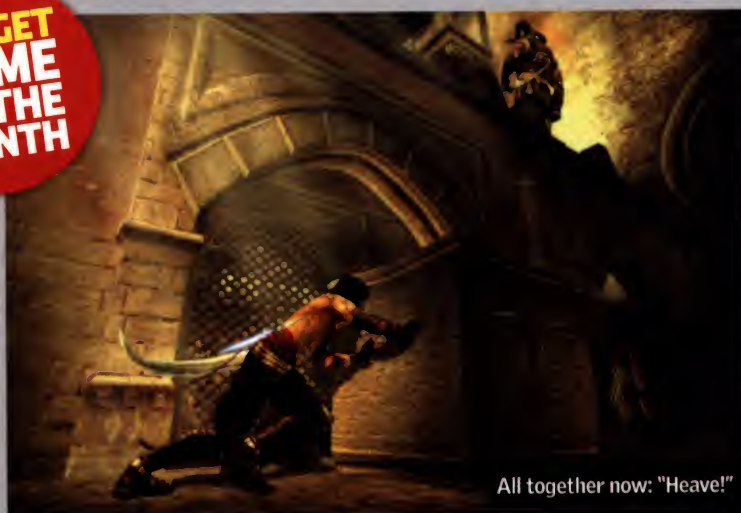
A purist like myself might argue that some of the 'hooks' to the game jar slightly – primarily the stealthy speed-kills and the frustrating chariot chases – but as far as fighting and puzzling goes, *The Two Thrones* outclasses the indomitable Lara Croft's *Legend* with ease.

The schizophrenic divide between the nice prince and the nasty, as ably displayed by the superb jaggedness and brutality of the Daggertail weapon, works really well too. However, the real joy comes through the sheer challenge and fluidity of the game.

Deep down, I'd rather you sample the narrative charm of *SOT*, but *The Two Thrones* is a far more proficient combat and adrenalin machine. The choice is yours.

Will Porter

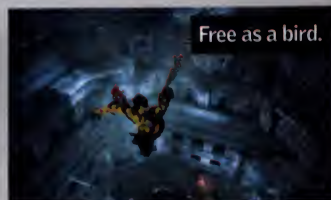
PCZONE
81



All together now: "Heave!"



Feeling boxed in?



Free as a bird.



He realised too late there was no water beneath him.

DEVIL MAY CRY 3

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

DEVIL MAY CRY 4 has now been announced for PC, so this could be a good time for you to check out the last third-person action-adventure featuring the dual-gun-wielding devilish anti-hero Dante. This is simple but satisfying console-y fun, as you thrash through the post-apocalyptic gothic environments, hacking, slashing and shooting every hell-beast that lurches into existence.

Red orbs can be collected that, when traded, give you access to upgraded weapons and combos. What's more, the Devil Trigger ability that's unleashed in later levels gives you some heavenly monster-twattling power-ups.

This is a typically unkempt console conversion from Capcom (who recently released a very poor version of *Resident Evil 4*), so you'll have to negotiate some

fiddly joypad setting up and a lack of quick-saves. Yet despite its faults, *Devil May Cry 3* provides a few hours of joyful ultra-violent nonsense – just prepare for much gnashing of teeth when you have to restart a level all over again when a boss battle goes awry.

Jamie Sefton

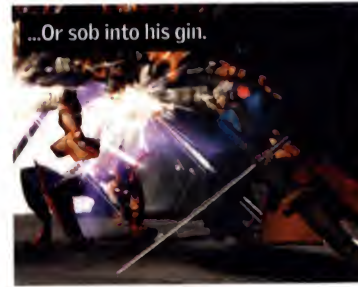
PCZONE
66



He might not cry though...



...He might just cackle...



...Or sob into his gin.

THIS MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...

Jamie changed his mobile from Vodafone to O2:
Saving: £25 a month



Will forgot to eat breakfast:
Saving: £3.50



The team getting free pizza from PR folks:
Saving: £8.50



ROME: TOTAL WAR – BARBARIAN INVASION

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gspsoftware.co.uk PRICE £9.99

FOLLOWING HOT ON the heels of the *Alexander* expansion comes one riddled with Barbarians. What's more, in the spirit of the *Viking Invasion* expansion for the original *Medieval: TW*, or *Mongol Invasion* for *Shogun: TW*, the focus of this is masses of burly nomadic men on the rampage.

While Creative Assembly may have taken a few historical liberties with the addition of some most likely 'made-up down the pub' units (Graal Knights and a thinly veiled King Arthur spring to mind), if you can live with the historical inaccuracies (go on, live a little), the gameplay is as brilliant as ever. Maybe more so.

Priest units dish out buffs to nearby troops, your infantry have finally taken some swimming lessons and the new

night battles, complete with flaming arrows and catapults, are spectacular stuff. Unlike *Alexander*, it's not available as a cheap download, so if you're a *Rome: TW* fan but you don't already have this on your shelf, the Huns are an essential addition.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
80



BLITZKRIEG ANTHOLOGY

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gspsoftware.co.uk PRICE £9.99

MANAGING TO CRAM in the original *Blitzkrieg*, plus the *Burning Horizon*, *Rolling Thunder* and *Iron Division* expansions – as well as some extra fan materials for good measure – this anthology features as much strategic WWII gaming as any one person could need. In fact, coming in at a total of nearly 150 missions, we're sure it should come with some kind of health warning on the side.

Nival's excellent title and its expansions are getting on a bit now though, with the sequel and its own expansions now doing the rounds. But if the sheer thought of ordering around a unit of Panzer tanks makes you shiver with excitement, you'll be hard pushed to find so much value for your money anywhere else.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
72



And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



CUSTOMPLAY GOLF
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL RELOAD

As well as smacking the ball with your club, *CP Golf*'s main emphasis is on its course editor. With its advanced features allowing you to sprinkle boulders, bunkers and balls as you see fit, it's a shame that hitting the ball isn't that much fun.

PCZONE
64



KNIGHTS OF HONOR
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL RELOAD

This medieval strategy title offers a massive, real-time gaming area with plenty of town building, but is let down by some rubbish combat and a slow pace. On top of that, they can't even spell 'honour' correctly. Next.

PCZONE
55



ANNO 1503: THE NEW WORLD
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL RELOAD

Requiring lots of pre-play research and featuring some annoying interface issues, *Anno 1503* is hard work. If you can live with the ageing graphics though, there's an extremely deep and addictive empire builder just waiting to get out.

PCZONE
59

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1

FAR CRY
£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the cheapest goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.



3

THE MOVIES

£9.99, ACTIVISION 'BEST OF' RANGE
A great movie-studio management title that transcends the genre by also offering a raft of brilliant film-making tools. Home-made machinima ahoy!



4

ROME: TOTAL WAR
£9.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

A long-term chart-topper, *Rome: TW*'s glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



5

PSYCHONAUTS
\$19.95 (£9.99), STEAM

Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this title into the stratosphere of platformers.

BUYER'S GUIDE



The bestest games your money can buy...

PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'M'

- 1 **MAGIC CARPET**
(ISSUE 21)
- 2 **THE MOVIES**
(ISSUE 162)
- 3 **MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT**
(ISSUE 112)
- 4 **MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE**
(ISSUE 136)
- 5 **MICRO MACHINES 2**
(ISSUE 29)

PCZONE TOP 5 MOST BUGGY GAMES ON RELEASE

- 1 **BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL**
(ISSUE 157)
- 2 **SOLDNER: SECRET WARS**
(ISSUE 145)
- 3 **TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS**
(ISSUE 132)
- 4 **VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES**
(ISSUE 150)
- 5 **GOthic 3**
(ISSUE 174)



PCZONE TOP 5 ACTUAL BUGS IN GAMES

- 1 **ANTLION - HALF-LIFE 2**
(ISSUE 148)
- 2 **BUGS - STARSHIP TROOPERS**
(ISSUE 163)
- 3 **CREEPERS - WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
(ISSUE 152)
- 4 **OPTIONAL GIANT SPIDER BOSS - DARK MESSIAH**
(ISSUE 174)
- 5 **ROACHES - THE SIMS 2**
(ISSUE 147)



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2

PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



BUDGET

FAR CRY

PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE

PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2

PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

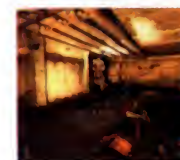
Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



F.E.A.R.

PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

PCZ Issue: 179 - 85%

Despite being a bit on the late side, *STALKER* remains a fantastic outing for PC shooters with its unique setting, great action and genuine attempt to do something new.

Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Massive battles and huge armies comprising of thousands of air, sea and land units? Tick. Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? Tick. One of the most unique RTS titles around? Tick.



C&C3: TIBERIUM WARS

PCZ Issue: 180 - 86%

A modern-day rehash of the old-school *Command & Conquer* formula we all know and love, but with polished visuals, the triumphant return of the FMV and an excellent new faction. A play is most certainly in order.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



BUDGET

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

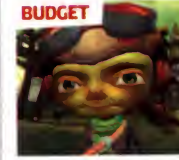
A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op, and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



BUDGET

PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BUDGET

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs



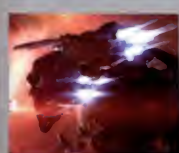
MUST BUY!
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WoW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation



MUST BUY!
X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



BUDGET
FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0: ALLIED FORCE
PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing



MUST BUY!
GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



TRACKMANIA UNITED
PCZ Issue: 179 - 86%
Now with online play and community via broadband, this previously Gallic institution is a total joy to play. Not your conventional racer, and so fast it'll make your eyes do backflips.

God games



MUST BUY!
THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
While it might not strictly be a god game, *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source Engine, from functional robots to saucy ragdoll jpegs. Try it out and see for yourself.



BUDGET
EVIL GENIUS
PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



BUDGET
VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport



MUST BUY!
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007
PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07
PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.

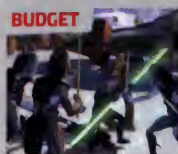


NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this *06* incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.

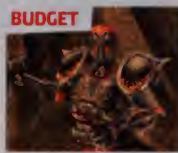
Role-playing games



MUST BUY!
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



BUDGET
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



BUDGET
THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



BUDGET
DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
PCZ Issue: 176 - 86%
An identical twin to *NWN* but using modern technology, *NWN2* has all the gleeful D&D levelling we love, plus tons of modding opportunities. If you have a beard, this is for you.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

May

HALO 2
LOTR ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

MICROSOFT
CODEMASTERS
EIDOS

Rest of Q2

ASSASSIN'S CREED
BLACKSITE: AREA 51
BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS
HELLGATE: LONDON
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN
MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE
OVERLORD
SHADOWRUN
STRANGLEHOLD

UBISOFT
MIDWAY
UBISOFT
CODEMASTERS
ACTIVISION
EA
EIDOS
EA
CODEMASTERS
MICROSOFT
MIDWAY

Q3

BIOSHOCK
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO
CRYSIS
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO
HEIST
HUXLEY
LEFT 4 DEAD
PARABELLUM
ROGUE WARRIOR
TABULA RASA
THE WITCHER
TIMESHIFT
UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT
WORLD IN CONFLICT

2K GAMES
CODEMASTERS
EA
THQ
VALVE/EA
CODEMASTERS
TBA
VALVE
TBA
BETHESDA
NCISOFT
ATARI
VIVENDI GAMES
SEGA
VIVENDI GAMES

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**PCZONE**

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Old git

BY NOW, YOU should know that I'm slowly turning into the curmudgeonly old fart who reminds you of your father. More and more things are making less and less sense to me, and it's so often a delight not just to get angry at them, but to find someone the same age who shares my senior citizen-like disapproval of everything new.

When chatting with a friend about his car, I was gratified to hear him complain about its air conditioning. To set the temperature, he had to push a button to raise it by one degree, and push another to lower it. To his mind, this was an infinitely more stupid replacement for the heating controls in his last vehicle, where the job was accomplished by just rotating a dial. Left for hot, right for cold. Like a tap.

I said that my microwave was exactly the same, in that if I wished to cook a potato I now had to guess its weight and then hammer a tiny ZX-81-style keyboard to set kilograms, minutes and seconds. If I need to lengthen the time, I can't just crank a timer knob clockwise – I have to stop and start over. It's ridiculous.

His BMW and my microwave are representative of the way new technology and new engineering are obscured behind an interface whose design and ergonomics are a massive backward step. As a result, your life is made more complicated. Be grateful there's no space left for me to talk about Windows Vista...

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

CORE 2 WAHOO!

Think that new Intel chip of yours is pretty fast? You just wait...

LATE LAST MONTH, Intel announced that its revamped Core 2 engines – codename Penryn and available soon – will be capable of running applications up to 45% faster than existing chips running at the same clock speed, thanks to the addition of huge caches and new technologies. And all without using any more power.

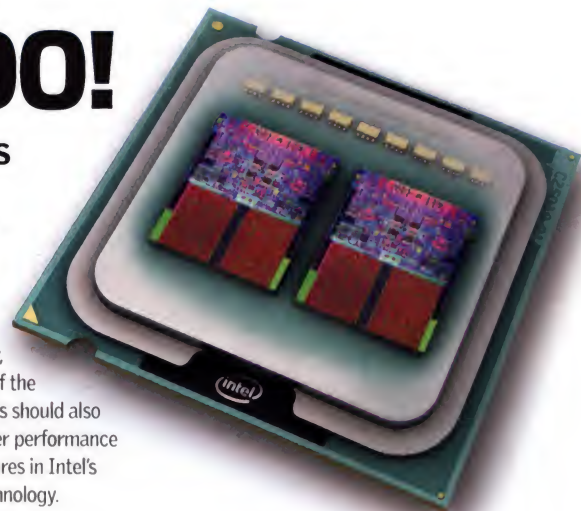
In addition, Intel's new way of making the chips should boost clock speeds north of 3GHz and will demand that motherboards are capable of supporting much higher bus speeds – in comparison, the existing Extreme X6800 runs at 2.93GHz with a 1066MHz front-side bus.

The new Core 2 engine will also leap from just shy of 300 million transistors to more than 400 million, but thanks to Intel's

Core 2 has just got even faster.

45nm process technology, they'll take up a quarter of the space. Quad-core products should also provide significantly better performance thanks to some new features in Intel's dynamic acceleration technology.

The news that Intel will introduce processor-integrated graphics as an option in 2008 was unexpected, as it's exactly what AMD are planning. Although it's targeted at mobile markets, the theory is that the Core 2 engine will be more than capable of providing a decent gaming experience for mainstream users.



AGP LIVES!

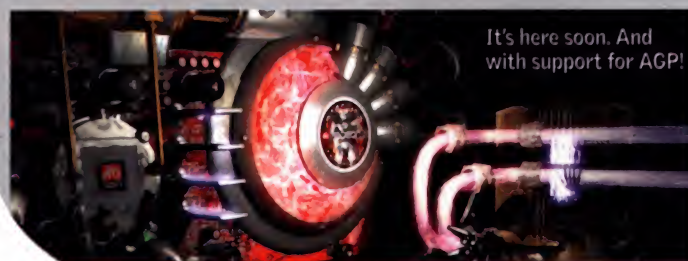
DirectX10 now for AGP users

WONDERING WHETHER YOUR '90s-style motherboard will be able to hack the latest in 21st century graphics? Ponder no longer.

Although NVIDIA are still having issues with their G80 line-up, AMD have confirmed that they'll not have any trouble bringing the upcoming

R600 and its various derivations to an AGP port near you.

It's not likely that you'll see flagship models made available for the old-style slot – the AGP interface can't deliver the power for that – but you'll see at least three or four mainstream DX10 cards making it to shop shelves. ati.amd.com



It's here soon. And with support for AGP!

NEWS ROUND-UP

Canadian company Bioscrypt have introduced a USB face recognition camera, due for launch in early autumn. VisionAccess 3D DeskCam will authenticate people using a desktop PC, and works by scanning your mug in three dimensions. It then identifies you by comparing 40,000 distinct points on the imported 3D mesh. The device's makers report that it can even tell identical twins apart. www.bioscrypt.com

Ever thought about how far your wireless network reaches, and who else in the vicinity sees your SSID popping up in their wifi connection screen? EM-SEC Technologies have the answer: EM-SEC 2060 Wireless Security Coating, a liquid electromagnetic barrier that's painted onto your walls to restrict the passage of RF signals. The paint is already used by the US government and costs from \$4 per square foot. www.emsectechnologies.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

JUMPER SETTINGS: For example, fully on, sleeves rolled up to the elbows, one hand inside so you can grab your sleeve and do that funny stomach-punching thing. **PCMARK:** Mark Lamarr's new television show, in which he becomes a policeman and fights petty crime. **NET 2.0:** A society of user-created nets, where people can upload their own nets and share them with friends and family. **ULTRAMON:** The evolved form of Verygoodmon, who is in turn the evolved form of Mediocremon. **3DMARK:** Mark Lamarr's upcoming television show, in which he falls into a monitor and lives inside a virtual world.

VIVE LE VISTA?

Phil Wand rounds up seven of the best gaming PCs running Vista...

IF YOU BELIEVE I have the ultimate dream job, you should have been here this past week. You would have seen me stagger about with seven large boxes, assemble seven PCs in a fog of sweat and cursing, and then play musical chairs endlessly between them – all the while scribbling notes in last year's diary and periodically banging my head on the desk.

Each PC cost £1,200 or less. Each install of Vista had to be patched and configured

so that it was identical to the one alongside it. The benchmarks were then installed over the network, a process which took up to 40 minutes per PC. After the tests were run through at least twice, rebooting between each stage, the system drive was then 'ghosted' back to the network using Acronis True Image.

Everything was then wiped and the disk formatted ready for a brand new copy of Windows XP. Again, the PCs were all

patched, configured and benchmarks were installed and run. Look at each system and you'll see a box detailing the results, with XP scores being shown in brackets.

As for Vista itself? Well, it feels like an operating system not yet ready for primetime. There are too many rough edges and too many missing drivers, but it's something many of us will be using come this time next year. In short, get used to it. I know I have...

**HARDWARE
REVIEWS
SPECIAL!**

Vista feels like an operating system not yet ready for primetime – but it's something many of us will be using soon

SOLAR CREATION

PRICE £999 **MANUFACTURER** Evesham Technology **WEBSITE** www.evesham.com

FROM A VALUE standpoint, the Solar Creation is the most appealing system here, despite being the 'wrong' config and some way short of the £1,200 budget.

I'd originally wanted to look at an entry-level model from Evesham's flagship range, but for various reasons it never came about. The company's Ultimate PCs offer the same basic specifications as the Solar, but have 8-Series cards in place of the old GeForces and are £300 more expensive.

Presentation and build are excellent. The packaging is bespoke, and a newbie-friendly A2 poster explains how to fit it all together. The chassis is further evidence of Evesham's High Street aspirations, with a sombre appearance, no second PCIe slot and little room for decent cooling. It's very quiet though, and despite plenty of drive bay room is clearly something most buyers will use as-is for its entire lifespan. It's a worthy recipient of our 'Good Value' award.

HOW DOES IT GO?

If you're upgrading from Pentiums and Athlons, the Solar will be a stellar performer. If you're a casual gamer, there's more than enough grunt on offer to keep you happy here, and where the

frame-rate does get choppy, you simply have to back off the detail.

Of course, the moment you look around the following pages at the other competitors, you realise just how much you're missing out on: it's actually the slowest one here.

SPECIFICATION

Operating System Windows Vista Home Premium
Processor Core 2 Duo E6600 **Memory** 2GB
HDD 320GB **Video** 1 x GeForce 7900 GS 256MB
Warranty 3 years

VISTA BENCHMARKS (XP scores)

Supreme Commander	14,068 (14,099)
Counter-Strike: Source	125.82 fps (127.02 fps)
3DMark06	4,954 (5,013)
PCMark05	6,158 (6,307)
Vista Experience Index	5.3

PCZONE
84



GAMER INFINITY SLI CUSTOM

PRICE £1,199 MANUFACTURER CyberpowerPC WEBSITE www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

THE GAMER INFINITY is a custom rig build around Intel's E6700 and it's the only one here to feature two cards working in tandem, instantly netting it the 'Twitching Boxer Shorts' award.

Hauling the case from its box, the first thing that strikes you is the ghostly outline of four 120mm cooling fans lurking behind the side panel. There's an additional 120mm fan at the front, a further two at the rear and a smaller 80mm sitting on top.

If you're expecting me to act all surprised at how the machine actually ran quieter than a passing butterfly, forget it. The Cyberpower is more like a low-flying Airbus, such is the din created by those turbines. But I should say that I'm not going to deduct marks for lack of subtlety, because we're here to play games and Cyberpower is an American company. Americans don't do quiet.

HOW DOES IT GO?

Like the wind, appropriately. Even though its Experience Index is but a fraction ahead of

the slowest competitor here, the remaining benchmarks are perceptibly better – Microsoft's scoring is irrelevant to gamers.

Certainly, if you're someone who uses their PC primarily to shoot stuff, the Infinity is a setup that offers power straight from the box, together with serious headroom for upgrades. Just don't forget your earmuffs.

VISTA BENCHMARKS (XP scores)

Supreme Commander	15,582 (15,624)
Counter-Strike: Source	234.48 fps (251.01 fps)
3DMark06	9,358 (9,658)
PCMark05	6,424 (6,471)
Vista Experience Index	5.4

PCZONE
82



SPECIFICATION

Operating System Windows Vista Home Premium
Processor Core 2 Duo E6700 Memory 2GB
HDD 320GB Video 2 x GeForce 8800 GTS 320MB
Warranty 3 years

NEUTRON CUSTOM

PRICE £1,050 MANUFACTURER Vadim Computers WEBSITE www.vadim.co.uk

IF YOU'RE CONCERNED that the E4300 is 'a bit budget' for a spunky games machine, check out the scores. The most teeny-weensy processor here is actually one of the strongest contenders.

Build quality is excellent, as is the choice of case and key components – there's a tidy interior and attention to detail everywhere. There's also a slightly naff plaque on the side bearing the name of the guy who built it, and the system gets our 'Extreme Packaging' award for turning up in the largest box we've ever seen. With room enough for several Albanian immigrants, the PC it

contained was – somewhat ironically – the smallest on test.

There were some gripes. The Neutron had an 'unknown device' entry in device manager and initially refused to play *Supreme Commander*, locking up solid during testing. But I don't believe it was anything more sinister than slightly flaky NVIDIA drivers.

HOW DOES IT GO?

Vadim's rig turned out to be the strong but silent type, capable of delivering snappy performance across the board

while remaining no noisier than the Xworks, Dell or Chillblast. Its PCMark05 score was the highest by some margin, and the *Supreme Commander* benchmark was but a whisker behind the winning Hydra. The only thing that bothered me was the outsized HTPC chassis being too big for the desktop and too wide for the floor.

VISTA BENCHMARKS (XP scores)

Supreme Commander	16,439 (16,485)
Counter-Strike: Source	199.57 fps (208.42 fps)
3DMark06	9,213 (9,277)
PCMark05	8,698 (8,834)
Vista Experience Index	5.7

PCZONE
85



SPECIFICATION

Operating System Windows Vista Home Premium
Processor Core 2 Duo E4300 Memory 2GB
HDD 320GB Video 1 x GeForce 8800 GTS 320MB
Warranty 2 years

DIABLO SLI

PRICE £1,199 MANUFACTURER Wired2Fire WEBSITE www.wired2fire.co.uk

THE DIABLO SLI makes for a great comparison with the Dimension and X8i-C2D. All have the GTX, but Wired2Fire, like Dell, have plumped for the E6600 processor in place of Xworks' E6700.

The Diablo is also conspicuous as being the only machine to arrive with a ShockWatch impact sensor stuck to its packaging. This lets you know if the box has been 'abused' in transit, and pretty much guarantees safe passage between the stockroom and your front door. The company also include a sheet of engineer's notes detailing everything from potential driver issues to optimised system restore points, and peripherals arrive separately in a small but perfectly formed leather suitcase. Wired2Fire thus receive our 'Warm Feeling' award.

It's also the only machine here using the entry level of Vista. That means you miss out on DVD Maker, Mahjong, Fax and Scan... Actually, who am I kidding? All you're missing is Aero rather than anything that might affect your gaming.

HOW DOES IT GO?

Very well indeed. And while I'll admit that plain Vista does look dated alongside spicy Vista, it's not a deal-breaker. The Diablo's benchmark scores are so impressive, and recent titles are all so deliciously velvety, that what Windows you're using is of no importance. Wired2Fire try to combine gaming performance with attention to detail, and as usual they're right on the money.

VISTA BENCHMARKS (XP scores)

Supreme Commander	16,254 (16,301)
Counter-Strike: Source	249.13 fps (259.44 fps)
3DMark06	10,019 (10,113)
PCMark05	7,671 (7,812)
Vista Experience Index	5.4

PCZONE
87

SPECIFICATION

Operating System Windows Vista Basic Processor Core 2 Duo E6600 Memory 2GB HDD 320GB Video 1 x GeForce 8800 GTX 768MB Warranty 2 years

X8i-C2D

PRICE £1,249 MANUFACTURER Xworks Interactive WEBSITE www.xworksinteractive.com

XWORKS SHIPPED THIS particular X8i-C2D with Vista Ultimate, giving you security features you'll never use and extras you don't need. You're basically paying to have Windows irritate you.

My experience of the new Windows means I'd forgo the senseless dick-waving of the big-ticket version and instead order either Home Basic or Home Premium. In no way is Ultimate worth the extra, unless you're a fan of animated desktop wallpapers.

The X8i-C2D itself is a typical Xworks desktop, meaning low-key looks and little noise, together with a pervading sense of no-nonsense. Hardly a surprise when the company normally sells to games developers and FI teams.

In addition, the X8i-C2D uses both the D975XBX2 motherboard and GeForce 8800 GTX from our Buyer's Guide, and as a result we're proud to announce it as winner of the coveted 'Machine We Would Build Ourselves If We Could Be Bothered' award.

HOW DOES IT GO?

Second fastest thing here. But it's not a rig that's tweaked at the factory, meaning that

you're free to dip into Intel's tickle-happy BIOS and knock up the clocks for even more get-up-and-go.

I would say, however, that an Xworks desktop isn't about being 'right up there' with spine-tingling bus frequencies: it's more to do with stability, reliability, unobtrusiveness and old-fashioned grunt – and in this respect, it succeeds. My one complaint is that the warranty's too short.

VISTA BENCHMARKS (XP scores)

Supreme Commander	16,577 (16,624)
Counter-Strike: Source	250.20 fps (266.26fps)
3DMark06	10,375 (10,415)
PCMark05	7,604 (7,901)
Vista Experience Index	5.4

PCZONE
90

SPECIFICATION

Operating System Windows Vista Ultimate Processor Core 2 Duo E6700 Memory 2GB HDD 320GB Video 1 x GeForce 8800 GTX 768MB Warranty 1 year





SPECIFICATION

Operating System Windows Vista Home Premium
Processor Core 2 Duo E6600 Memory 2GB
HDD 320GB Video 1 x GeForce 8800 GTX 768MB
Warranty 2 years

The Fusion Hydra is the fastest machine here, one of the cheapest, and it's also unnervingly quiet...

FUSION HYDRA

PRICE £1,100 MANUFACTURER Chillblast WEBSITE www.chillblast.com

THE FUSION HYDRA is not only the fastest machine here, it's also one of the cheapest. Premium-grade performance comes from carefully selected components and a stout overclock.

Chillblast guarantee their 3GHz tickle will remain entirely stable, and like a number of smaller manufacturers, they provide lifetime telephone support even after the warranty expires, meaning you get technical assistance for as long as you own the machine. In addition, they were second-fastest behind Wired2Fire in responding to an anonymous sales email.

There were no problems during testing, with the Intel chip proving once again why it's a superstar overclocker (and why nobody submitted any Athlons). Along with the Dimension 9200, X8i-C2D and Neutron, the Fusion was also unnervingly quiet, even under full load. The chassis is low-key, and scores extra points for having USB, FireWire and audio ports exposed along one edge at the top, providing easy access after

you've crammed the thing under your desk.

HOW DOES IT GO?

It's a tough decision, given the frankly awesome quality and speed of every other system here, but Chillblast are the ones who receive our highly desirable 'Fastest Bastard' award for a £1,100 machine which will keep most gamers happy for years to come.

VISTA BENCHMARKS (XP scores)

Supreme Commander	16,838 (16,893)
Counter-Strike: Source	256.75 fps (271.02 fps)
3DMark06	10,632 (10,732)
PCMark05	8,492 (8,520)
Vista Experience Index	5.5

PCZONE
91

DIMENSION 9200

PRICE £1,199 MANUFACTURER Dell WEBSITE www.dell.co.uk

NO TEST WOULD be complete without a Dell. Love them or hate them, today's Dimensions are well specified, well made and rarely beaten on price. This must bug the hell out of rivals.

And where rivals fail to include peripherals or a screen, Dell bundle a 22-inch widescreen panel, speakers, plus keyboard and mouse. It's not the fastest thing here, but there's no denying the value – the company also has regular offers where they cut prices and offer upgrades. At the time of writing, this came with £100 off and free shipping.

Of course, the downside to buying a Dell is the customer service provided at call centres by people for whom English is a second language and £1,199 is their annual salary.

HOW DOES IT GO?

Exceptionally well. You'd be hard-pushed to find a PC giving more bangs for your buck, and so this Dimension wins our 'Secretly We All Want Dells' trophy, rewarding a company whose products are far more tasty than most people give them credit.

VISTA BENCHMARKS (XP scores)

Supreme Commander	15,772 (15,923)
Counter-Strike: Source	251.67 fps (253.44 fps)
3DMark06	9,877 (10,018)
PCMark05	6,559 (6,813)
Vista Experience Index	5.3



SPECIFICATION

Operating System Windows Vista Basic
Processor Core 2 Duo E6600 Memory 2GB
HDD 500GB Video 1 x GeForce 8800 GTX
768MB Warranty 1 year

PCZONE
88

SO WHO'S THE WINNER?

As you've seen, there's a machine here for everyone. The outright winner has to be the Chillblast Fusion Hydra (above), for the simple reason that it was not only fastest but was also well within the £1,200 budget, at £1,100. For outstanding value, you can't beat the Evesham Solar Creation and Dell Dimension 9200, both of which came with LCD screens. Meanwhile, for pedigree, the self-effacing Xworks X8i-C2D can't be beaten. The Cyberpower Gamer Infinity provides the most alluring mix of technology and upgradeability, and the Wired2Fire Diablo is such a lovingly crafted package you'll want to put it in a glass cabinet next to your signed photo of Johnathan 'Media Whore' Wendell. And lastly there's the Vadim, an oddly intimidating PC – that's a good thing – which undercut all rivals but still managed to keep pace with them. In short, pick one and enjoy it.



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Boss offered you a 0.001% payrise? Got drunk and lost your horse in *Oblivion* again? Partner insisting you spend next Saturday at Bluewater? We can't help with any of those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

WRONG NUMBER

Q I built my current PC about two years ago from an ASRock K7S8XE, Athlon XP, AOpen GeForce 6800 GT and 1GB RAM. It's been great for running all the latest games, and I've just finished playing *Dark Messiah*.

Trouble is, for some reason the BIOS is now reporting that my XP 3200+ is actually an XP 1900+ running at 1466MHz. I don't know how long this has been the case, but it must have happened in the last month or so. Is the CPU on its way out? I was hoping this system would last me a while until the next leap into DirectX 10.

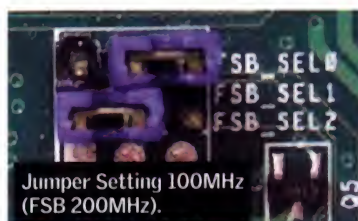
Les Denovan

A Athlon XP processors have an 'effective' (ie double data rate, DDR) front-side bus speed of either 400, 333 or 266, depending on which chip you actually own, with the 'real' speed on the board being 200, 166, or 133 respectively. How fast the chip actually goes depends on its multiplier, with the reported frequency being a product of the multiplier and the real board speed. In simple terms, multiplier x bus = MHz.

Your 3200+ has a DDR front-side bus of 400, an actual speed of 200 and a multiplier of 11. What this means is that the frequency of the chip should be $200 \times 11 = 2200\text{MHz}$. As we know, somewhere along the line the bus has been changed to 133, because $133 \times 11 = 1466\text{MHz}$, which is the bottom-line speed for an entirely different AMD product.

Normally, it's a remote possibility that your processor or motherboard is in its death throes when this occurs. What's far more likely is that, somewhere along the line, the bus has been wrongly set in the BIOS: this could happen if you give other people access to your machine, it could happen after a power spike or a BIOS update, or when the CMOS battery runs flat.

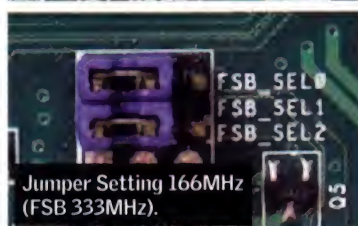
On ASRock's K7 boards, the bus frequency is by default set by jumpers and you have to open the lid and attack the board with a pair of tweezers to change it. But on the Advanced page of the BIOS there's an option to set it yourself. Simply go there and change the CPU Host Frequency type from 'Manual' to 'By Jumper Setting'. With thanks to SgtDave of the Dear Wandy forums.



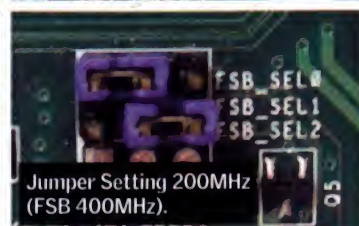
Jumper Setting 100MHz (FSB 200MHz).



Jumper Setting 133MHz (FSB 266MHz).



Jumper Setting 166MHz (FSB 333MHz).



Jumper Setting 200MHz (FSB 400MHz).

YOU'VE BEEN FRAMED

Q I can't get the ATI Catalyst 7.1 drivers that are on your DVDZone to install. I keep getting an error message which reads, 'Can't find .NET framework'. I've downloaded the framework and have installed it. Can you please help?

Peter Marsh

A This is something I've had to contend with myself when using much earlier versions of the Catalyst Control Center (CCC), the component which requires Microsoft's framework. My own problem was solved by uninstalling the ATI driver suite, uninstalling .NET 2.0, reinstalling .NET 1.0 and its related service packs, and then finally running the Catalyst installer. You're welcome to try this as it may just work!

Given the annoyance of having to muck about with Microsoft frameworks, and given the fact that I've never really got on with CCC anyway, I always make sure I choose a custom configuration in the installer options and select 'driver only'. It's

been plain sailing ever since, and while there have been enormous improvements in the Control Centre accompanying Catalyst 7x, it's still big and unsightly (it's been designed with Vista in mind), and many of us get along just fine without it.

GOT THE HUMPH

Q I've been having problems with my computer after a format of my hard drive and don't understand why. The worst one occurs when I launch an EA link, because all I get is a black box. A similar thing happens when I go to use Steam: some of the games are listed, but I can't click on any of them. In addition, Internet Explorer won't work properly and when I try to visit my Hotmail account it just shows a blank window. I now use Firefox.

I've tried to list as many of the problems as best I can. I've installed all the security updates and am running Windows Media Center Edition. Thank you for any help you can provide.

Daniel Humphrey

A I think the key here is Internet Explorer. Although best known as Microsoft's Web browser, the software engine behind IE is also used throughout Windows and in many applications, including Steam. It's used to display static pages, active content and to interact with the user via search forms. And if somehow it breaks, then a lot of things can go wrong.

The first thing I would do is check that the very core of your system isn't damaged by running the Windows File Checker. To do this, click the Start button, then Run, and



Catalyst Control Center: a pesky irritant for Peter Marsh.

DRIVER WATCH

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 7.1	21 FEB 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 190.21	2 NOV 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 190.25	20 FEB 07
	FOR VISTA	

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-Fi 5120000	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-Fi 5120000	08 MAR 07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 4.000000	10 JUL 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 4.000000	10 JUL 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY FOR VISTA	10 MAR 07
	2120002	

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"The pickle you're in is a result of your own actions – a depressing number of people are out to ruin your PC"

Wise words for us all, even if they're a bit late for Daniel Humphrey

type `sfc /scannow`. Wait for it to look at all your system files and replace them where necessary (you may well need your original Windows CD).

If this proves fruitless, your next best bet is to reinstall XP Service Pack 2 by browsing to microsoft.com/windowsxp/sp2, downloading the 266MB Network Installation Package, and then double-clicking it to start the process.

The penultimate option is to reinstall Windows itself by inserting your original disc in the drive, choosing Install on the initial page, followed by Upgrade. Do be aware that although this may overwrite some of your application settings, it should not overwrite your files.

And finally, format and reinstall. The pickle you've got yourself into is the result of your actions, not Windows. Make sure you use anti-virus tools, never install random crap from the Internet, and be aware of the fact that a depressing number of people are out to ruin your PC.

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

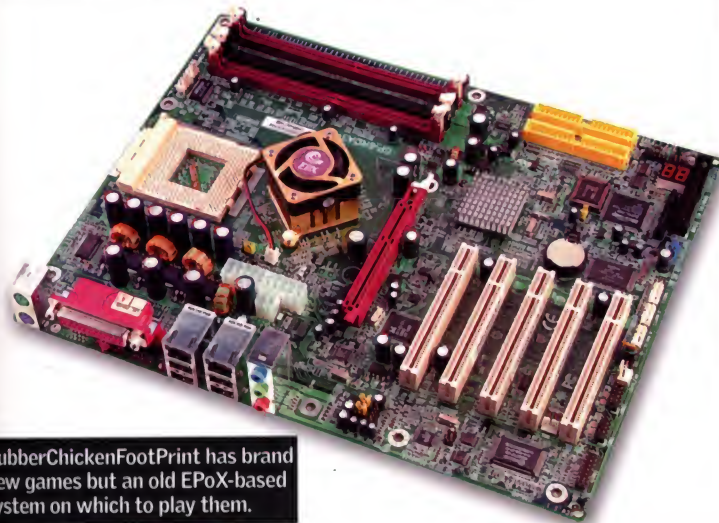
Q My ageing PC is an Athlon XP 2400+ with 2GB PC2700 RAM on an EPoX EP-8RDA3+. I have an unlocked GeForce 6800 GS, and am

considering buying a Radeon X1950 Pro to get me through the next six months before I buy a new rig and give this one to my eight-year-old son, who loves playing *Battlefield 2142* and *Oblivion*.

Basically, I need this upgrade to last me – and later my son – another year or two before it gets upgraded again. Is what I described a good idea, or will any performance gain be lost in some aged bottle-neck? Basically, do you have any other ideas to get this old donkey to last another two years?

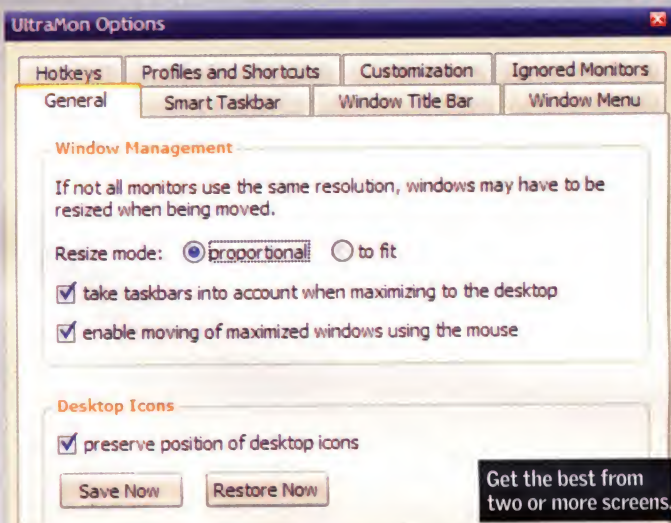
RubberChickenFootPrint

A The X1950 Pro is a fine choice, but do make sure you're not tricked into buying one of the cheaper PCI-Express variants as your EPoX board is AGP-only. While our favourite Radeon should give you a lift from your current GS, you're not going to be getting the boost your son may be dreaming of. Quite frankly, your rig is already close to its optimum state. There's no point adding more memory, and while you could keep an eye out for a faster Athlon, you'd be looking at a jump to a 200MHz bus speed, which would leave your 166MHz memory behind. **PCZ**



RubberChickenFootPrint has brand new games but an old EPoX-based system on which to play them.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



Get the best from two or more screens.

23 ULTRAMON

COSTS \$39.95 FROM ealtimeoft.com/ultramon/

Although I come from a multi-monitor background – my Macs have always had two screens, even back in the '80s – I've never had the urge to 'double up' under Windows. This wasn't because the PC was incapable of handling more than one display, but because I never needed more than 1280x1024 pixels on my Windows desktop.

Things have changed. Flat-panel monitors are absurdly cheap, and games are beginning to make proper sense of the technology. For example, *Supreme Commander* can be configured to put an overhead view of the entire world on your second monitor, giving you the opportunity to watch two areas of the battlefield at once.

It's good but not perfect. Problems arise with

older titles such as *BF1942* – although *BF* still launches and plays on your primary screen, it's possible for you to inadvertently move your cursor out of the game and onto the wrong monitor.

In looking for a way to get around this problem, I bumped into UltraMon. Not only does it provide a single-click way of deactivating screens you're not using, it also gives you a bunch of multi-monitor-friendly features. It can add caption bar buttons (and hotkey combinations) which allow you to 'jump' applications from one screen to another. It also allows you to maximise apps to the entire desktop, run a different screensaver on each monitor and can even create colour gradients which run left-to-right or top-to-bottom across all devices. Shame it's so pricey really.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(antsmith) I've lost about an inch from the left-hand side of my screen, and I now can't see the clock in the bottom right corner of my desktop. I installed *Commandos: Strike Force* yesterday, and perhaps changing the resolution of the game did it, but I've fiddled with the resolution settings in Control Panel>Display and I can't get it back to normal. Apart from this, everything seems normal. I run a 7900GT and an Acer AL1912 19-inch flat-screen monitor. (wiz) Have you tried the monitor controls? (antsmith) Cracked it, found 'reset'. (Wandy) Gosh, if only all problems were this easy!



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or, has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

When he explained that he hadn't cancelled his service, they simply hung up on him...

WATCHDOG



Bad companies need sorting – and good companies need praising...



THE ACCUSED:
BFG Technologies
PROBLEM:

Graphics card keeps breaking

As the RSPCA would have us know, dogs are for life – but reader Steven Corry didn't want a dog, he wanted a graphics card. Noticing that BFG offered a lifetime warranty, he plumped for their 6800GS card. Luckily so, because just a few months after purchasing it, the card had to be returned as it was overheating. Although he received a replacement quickly enough, that was dead on arrival, so was promptly returned too. And just recently, it gave up the ghost again. Steven's a bit annoyed and while he appreciates the fact that BFG have honoured their warranty, he feels he's been inconvenienced as he's had to pay for an insured courier and packaging three times.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: After we forwarded Steven's response on to BFG, we received a swift reply within a matter of days. The European marketing manager indicated that he'd personally taken on the incident and as a matter of courtesy, had agreed to upgrade Steven's card to repay him for any inconvenience. He also stated: "I can assure you that this problem is a rare one, as BFG Technologies prides itself on our reputation and that we endeavour to keep a strong focus on the service we provide to the end-user."

FINAL VERDICT: Upgraded card shipped out. Customer happy.



THE ACCUSED:
Toucan
PROBLEM: No

broadband or access to MAC code

We all know how easy it is to sign up to a broadband supplier nowadays, but reader Elliot Falk also knows how difficult it can sometimes be to leave. After experiencing some problems with his Toucan service back in February and receiving little to no advice or help for an entire week, he decided to leave and requested a Migration Authorisation Code (MAC). After 48 hours, he called to pick up his MAC code but was informed that it wasn't ready yet. When Elliot next called back, Toucan informed him that he'd been put in a cancellation procedure (even though he hadn't actually cancelled his account) and that would take ten days to complete, during which time he could not join another broadband provider. When he explained that he hadn't cancelled



TALK SURF MOBILE ABOUT

Toucan offered no explanation for their abysmal service.

SURF

Plans

- 512K Broadband
- 8Mb Broadband
- 56K Dial-Up
- Compare Speeds

Rates

- Internet Security
- Broadband Availability
- Help
- Self Care
- Compare our Services
- Information pack
- Tell-A-Friend

Make the Switch to Broadband

Join **ToucanSurf** now and get Broadband starting from as low as £13.99 a month you take it with any ToucanTalk plan and line rental.

512K

512K Broadband from only

£13.99
a month

JOIN NOW

8Mb

Up to 8Mb Broadband from only

£14.99
a month

JOIN NOW

his service and would like to speak to someone higher up, the person he was speaking to simply hung up on him... Three weeks later and he's been pushed from department to department but still hasn't got his MAC code or any access to his broadband service.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: After contacting Toucan but not hearing anything back, we tried a different approach and spoke to their parent company, Pipex. Soon afterwards, we received a phone call from Toucan assuring us that they were going to give Elliot his MAC code in the next couple of weeks and that they'd moved it forward. This didn't happen, but Elliot eventually got his code two months after requesting it.

Toucan declined to give us any sort of official statement, but Elliot is at least happy. "It's a relief to finally get my MAC code that allows me to leave Toucan, but it's a scandal it took so long and dozens of infuriating phone conversations with their numerous call centres." Rather worryingly, complaints of this kind seem to be getting more common across the board, so it's worth noting that Ofcom have now brought in a rule which requires "broadband providers to supply consumers with a MAC upon request and free of charge". If you're still having problems with this, then just let us know and we'll investigate.

FINAL VERDICT: MAC code received finally – but no official response.

SAINTS NOT SINNERS



Despite the recent lack of entries for the 'Saints Not Sinners' section, this

month we have not one but two companies who've offered service so good that readers have felt compelled to write in and tell us about it...

Reader Greg Stinson was tinkering with the innards of his PC when he discovered that he'd snapped off the piece that locks his side panel into place. Without it, his side panel bulged out and in Greg's own words, "looked a bit crap to be fair". He sent an email to

Antec and the same day received a reply containing a reference number which he was to forward on to another email. Three days after doing this, a new side panel arrived at his house without any money changing hands. Thanks to Antec, his unsightly bulge is no more.

When reader Steven Bristow's XFX AGP graphics card recently gave up the ghost under warranty, he sent it back to get fixed. While the card was away, Steven upgraded his machine to PCI-Express and when he asked if XFX could send him a PCI-Express card instead, they simply sent him one in place of his old one. Nice one XFX!

REMEMBER:
SPEAKERS ARE NO
GOOD IF YOU'VE
GOT NO EARS

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Money burning a hole in your wallet? Need something to spend it on? Look here...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £420

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

It would have been nice to have an ATI card against which we could compare the flagship GeForce, but the new Radeon isn't due for at least a month. So NVIDIA's DirectX 10 heavyweight won by default. It's still the fastest video card you can buy, but be careful – there are no Vista drivers yet.

PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

PAY £790

MAN Intel

WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY

£155

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY

£175

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



VP930

EXPECT TO PAY

£250

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY

£140

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY

£195

MANUFACTURER

Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

RADEON X1950 PRO

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER Sapphire

WEBSITE sapphiretech.com

A dazzling card at a glaringly low price. Sapphire's X1950 Pro gives you class-leading performance, beating both the GeForce 7900 GS and X1900 GT – the card on which it's based. And if you're looking to get into CrossFire, two of these filling your slots will keep you entertained for months.

PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY

£125

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £65

MANUFACTURER

ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD



1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY

£41

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY

£142

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710S is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time, 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games too.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

£32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY

£37

MANUFACTURER

Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.



THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

MARIO STRIKES BACK

One Man. Four Games. One Incredible Issue.

Official Nintendo Magazine
On Sale Now!



PCZONE

FREEPLAY



Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

FREE
GAMES!

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

2D is dead

THE LATEST THING to be 'dead', now that it's apparent that PC gaming is not dead and neither is Coca-Cola or the vast supply of crude oil beneath the Middle East, is 2D gaming. In what was clearly a case of somebody forgetting they had to write an irate Internet feature for a games website in time for tea, it was suggested that games not featuring 3D are old hat.

Even if that was true of commercial titles, which it's not, one just has to look at the indie and freeware industry to see that 'classic' games development is still alive and well. Check out this month's Freeware for an example of this – if *Poyo* had been released back in the '80s, it would be heralded as a classic. I reckon Steam, that bastion of indie development, could do with a freeware section to champion these games alongside the *Half-Lives* and *Psychonauts* of this world. Otherwise, the poor things fall into shameful, ill-fitting obscurity.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

Try this!

Exploding gambler



In *Jade Empire*'s Battle Arena, find the dice gambler who challenges you to guess higher or lower in consecutive dice throws. Using save-game manipulation, guess correctly 20 times in a row to make the guy explode with rage. Literally!



Military circles.

106 Demo pages

New and classic demos galore!



Sonic spirals.

108 News

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



Platforming squares.

110 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



Virtual cubes.

112 Play!

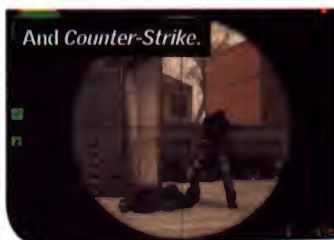
Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



City grids.

113 Intelligent design

Maxis senior designer Alex Hutchinson says that simplicity is the key



And Counter-Strike.

117 Fight Club

It turns out they were fighting words after all

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

200.2
HOURS*

Demos

Jon Blyth rounds up our free DVD...



Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

Tiberium-diddly-dum-diddly tum tum tum www.commandandconquer.ea.com

FOR A DEEP, involving RTS, C&C3 doesn't half move at a pace. The tutorial is over in a matter of unpatronising minutes, and the demo level (the Global Defence Initiative's prologue) doesn't give you the lazy ride you might expect, either. What begins as a fairly typical routine tour of the control panels quickly descends into a spirited spat between the GDI and the long-silent Brotherhood of Nod, who're planning something sizey.

I'm sure you've sat through as many tedious tutorials as we have, but this is C&C; after the needlessly great FMV, after the itchiness of your clicking finger when you get clearance to fire the ion cannon, and after the way the whole situation just dissolves into dirt, you'll never be happy until you've played the full game. Unless you don't like RTS games, in which case you'll just go "wah wah wah, thrrrrrrrrp", and drum your fingers on your bottom lip.



MOBILE CONSTRUCTION

Your MCV has just arrived from the airport and unpacked its stuff. Factor 15, beach towels, two pairs of pants per day, and – there they are – two airfields and a ruddy great silo.



ENGINEERS

The first thing you'll notice is that the GDI engineers are far more professional than the ones you get in pornography, and rarely stop repairing a bridge to watch two women in a bath.

FOUR OF THE BEST With my knobby-headed Kane...



ION CANNON HOOP-LA

And when a slap doesn't work, you're given permission to wipe them off the face of the Earth with a beam from outer space. Where's your ion cannon, Nod? Oh, you don't have one. Stupid Nod.



THE ENEMY BASE

And here's the Nod base. These quasi-cultish nutjobs – or visionary proponents of humanity's next step, if you're playing their missions – are kicking up a fuss and need the GDI slapdown.

SNIPPETS



INSANE NOT ACTUALLY FREE

www.codemasters.com
Last month, we said *Insane* had been made free. What we meant to say was that it is in fact not free, and still a commercially available product. Codemasters have apologised and the full game download has been taken off their website. We can only guess how many people have been fired.



HELL FOR RED NOSE CHEATS

www.ttgames.com
Traveller's Tales games last month embraced the Red Nose Day attitude by allowing people to customise their characters in *LEGO Star Wars 2* with red noses. Interestingly, people could click the 'I've donated' button and get the code to unlock the nose without donating a penny to charity. These people, however, are going to hell.

FRUIT SHOOTS

Fruit-Life provides one of your five-a-day

mods.moddb.com/8618 | Mod for: Half-Life 2

THE FIRST STEP on the path to creating your first mod usually involves swapping some textures around. Maybe you'll paint a goatee on a lady or a swear word on the side of a cow, before finally admiring your handiwork in-game, laughing and clapping your hands together with childlike joy.

Fruit-Life is pretty much one of these mods taken to, er, fruition. Characters, enemies, vehicles and guns are replaced with fruit and veg, with little explanation. Metrocops become Meloncops, grenades become cauliflower grenades, the

buggy becomes a bananacar. Headcrabs? Meloncabs.

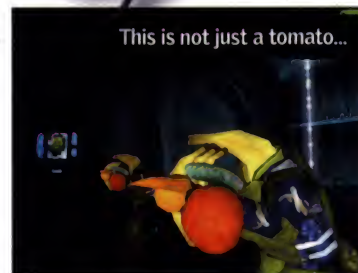
Does it seem stupid? Perhaps. Or maybe it's so stupid that it just might be brilliant. From what we've seen and read so far, *Fruit-Life* will be hilarious for a good ten minutes before we tut and say: "That's silly, this is just silly." The fanciful fruit-based fun should be finished on a Friday in the next month or so.



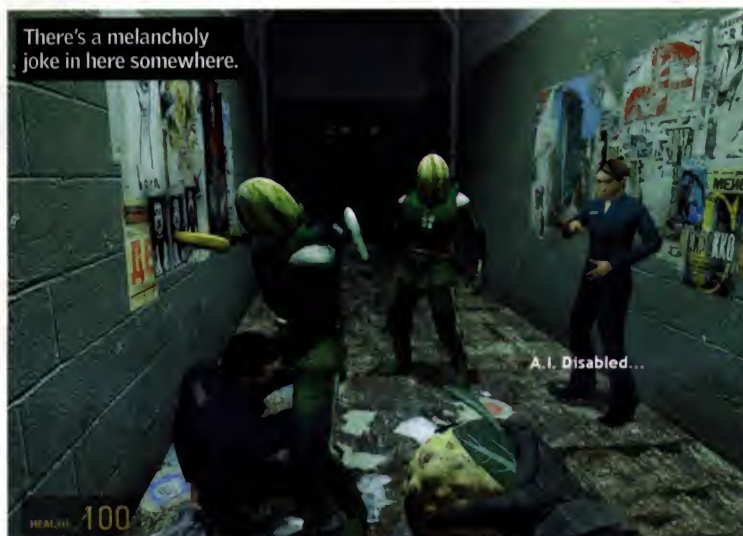
And they're not in pyjamas.



Why, it's a carrot shotgun of course!



This is not just a tomato...



There's a melancholy joke in here somewhere.

A.I. Disabled...

UP HIS SLEEVEVERIES?

Blizzard introduces the *WOW* Armory

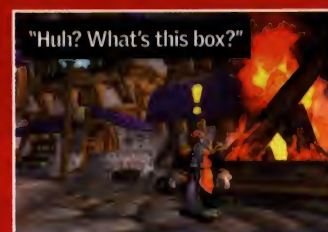
armory.worldofwarcraft.com

WITH THE ABSOLUTELY massive amounts of data (massive possibly being the most incorrect way of describing a lot of data) sloshing around the *World Of Warcraft* servers, it makes sense that there should be a way to sample a certain piece of information at any time from any Web browser.

Say for example, a rogue 'takes you from behind' outside Orgrimmar. Jot down his name, stick it into Blizzard's Armory and you'll get a complete rundown of his character, what he's wearing, what his skills are, what guilds he belongs to and all sorts of other crazy things. Then plot your revenge.

If you even have the faintest interest in this, then know that the sort of info the Armory provides is

exactly what sites like Thottbot are missing. A semi-vital bookmark for *WOW* fans at least.



"Huh? What's this box?"



Happy May, everyone.

SONIC BOOM

Ashura: Dark Reign gets ready to offend

xr-s.com/sxf/ | Mod for: Unreal Tournament 2004

IF THERE'S ONE way you can get your *Sonic* mod noticed, it's by claiming that "like *UT2004* it will contain violence, blood and gore, with the off chance of cursing and possibly some sexual reference".

Off chance? Possibly? Are even the developers worryingly unable to predict what the hedgehog is going to do next? As if he's some prickly blue Pete Doherty appearing on morning



Green Hill Zone - check.

television? Apparently so, and if that's not enough to pique your interest, check out how much work they've done so far - the movies they've released on their website are nothing short of amazing.

Let's just hope they don't get too bogged down in smutty *Sonic* fanfiction, and concentrate on dodging the ever-vigilant Sega lawyers long enough to get a Beta out.

DEVELOPER DIARY:

To Infinity and beyond

FLAVIEN BREBION DISCUSSES THE MAKING OF SPACE MMO INFINITY...

"ONE OF THE main features of *Infinity* is its seamless planetary engine. We've invested a lot of time and effort into this part of the game, which exists in no other game (at least, not as far and as detailed as we plan to go). It's possible to go from orbit to the surface without seeing a single loading screen as we're streaming data from disk, or procedurally generating it.

"It's been a headache to develop though. Most games render a flat terrain, but our planetary surface is curved, and we're rendering details up to a horizon that can be hundreds, or even thousands of kilometres away, depending on the camera altitude. We're planning to add detail to our planets, like vegetation (grass

and forests), mountains, hills, oceans, volumetric clouds, or rifts and craters for barren planets.

"It's a strange feeling to stand on a planet, look at a moon in the sky and think: 'If I can see it, I can go there.' And who knows, maybe on this little moon, one of your friends is looking at the sky too, and thinking the exact same thing."



SPACE COWBOY Free MMO "just like StarFox64"

sco.gpotato.com

IT'S GREAT TO be able to say you're a fan of free MMOs, but all too often it seems that free MMOs just aren't that good. They're either buggy, dull, or a careful mixture of the two. But how could a free MMO called *Space Cowboy*, which has been likened to *StarFox*, ever be anything other than brilliant?

Choose a gear (a fighter ship) to start with, head out into the game-world to decimate an endless number of NPC ships, upgrade your gear, avoid the space bees, level-up and take part in some decent PvP and missions. Occasionally, there'll even be a server-wide effort to take out an enemy mothership, and the option to form and join a brigade (read 'guild', MMORPGers).

With FPS-style gameplay rather than the typical point-and-click interface of almost every other MMO ever made, *Space Cowboy* is another example of freeware developers taking MMO concepts further than commercial developers would ever dare – and already it's become massively popular. Join in right now.



Movie of the month BIOSHOCK

Back once again to the game that's been goading our goats for so long, it now feels like we were born excited by diver's suits. Yes, this video showing the killing of a big daddy, and the desperate fear in his young companion once he's gone, is as desperately chilling as it is LET'S KILL THINGS...

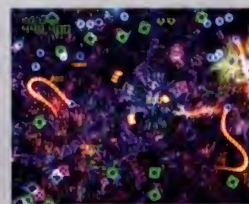
Welcome to Rapture? Thank you very much. Where should I put my case?

Little girls, coughing blood. It wasn't in the brochure, but you get what you pay for.

There's so much going on, we reckon they've craftily snuck god mode on.

That's the big chap killed. And now... Some serious soul-searching.

SNIPPETS



GEOMETRY WARS

www.google.com
Microsoft have released *Geometry Wars* exclusively for Vista, meaning XP owners attempting to install the game will be denied access until they fork out for Microsoft's new OS. Could there already be unofficial XP 'fixes' on the Internet? We'd say it's 'very probable'.



WIND WOES, MORE LIKE

windowsupdate.microsoft.com
Think your animated dinosaur cursor that allows you to click stuff with a T-Rex is safe? Not at all! Windows animated cursors, funnily enough, contain a massive security flaw! Update now!

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH THE SIMS 2: PETS



"Pets can now properly use helicopters to go to work with other Sims." What a relief.

8

8



Freeware



We're so over paying for games – and so is *Steve Hogarty*

Freeware brings you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes or webgames – you'll never have to buy another game again. This month, you can be alone in the dark, pursue your platforming passions, get lost in a pixel haze and seek out Waldo...

POYO Pure purple platforming pleasure

Dev: Lazrael | www.vertigogaming.net/poyo.htm

CALL IT SOMETHING impossibly lame like 'gamer's intuition', but everybody knows within a matter of seconds whether or not a platformer feels right. It's probably down to a mixture of a number of variables like running speed, acceleration and jumping height, and if a game can get them right, it magically becomes enjoyable to play. For example, nobody wanted to play as Luigi in *Super Mario Bros 2* because he jumped like he'd been kicked in the arse.

Poyo on the other hand feels brilliant to play, and it backs this up with some great puzzle-based levels built around your character's ability to warp a certain distance in all four directions – pretty much exactly like *Nightcrawler* from *X-Men*. This power is used to jump otherwise impossible gaps, or avoid traps and activate switches.

The introductory levels, with names like 'Warp-a-gap', are fairly simple to traverse, but as the game goes on it adds layers of game mechanics such as lasers, those weird upward draught things, and switches. These platforming staples give way to levels like the aptly titled 'Bullshit', which may make you tear your face off with frustration, staple it to a cat's head



Poyo will make you jump for joy.

**FREEWARE
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

The aptly titled 'Bullshit' level may make you tear your face off with frustration and staple it to a cat's head

IN THE PIT Feeling down?

Dev: Studio Hunty
www.studiohunty.com/itp/

THIS IS ABSOLUTELY genius, and I demand that you play it right away. You'll need an Xbox 360 pad for Windows (or the snazzy new wireless ones recently released), and ideally a decent pair of headphones. What it is, is a game with no graphics whatsoever. You play a monster in a pit, and you must hunt people thrown into the pit by listening to the direction and volume of their breathing. When you get close enough, the pad vibrates, and at the crucial moment you press a button and eat them.

At first it's ridiculously confusing, but soon you begin to visualise your imaginary surroundings with worrying accuracy. The voice-acting is bad, but in a good way. For example: "Sir, the thieves are escaping into the sewers." "Excellent, that leads them right into... THE PIT!"

Play it now!



Brown blocks – what can it all mean?

and post it to the developer with a note saying "this is what I think of your game".

So yes, it's harsh, it's cat-with-a-human-face-harsh. Each death forces you to restart the level, but that said, with the game providing perfect controls you never feel cheated. Boss levels interject the level-beating routine, and the lovely graphics beam charm out of every countable pixel. Also, it runs in a tiny window, so get your reading glasses out.



Small, but perfectly formed.

MERITOUS

Dev: ASCEAI | www.asceai.net/meritous/

IMAGINE NEVERWINTER NIGHTS stripped to the bone and given pixel graphics, and you sort of have *Meritous*. It's only one stop above those spoof RPGs in which you play a generic circle on a quest to kill a number of increasingly powerful triangles – but saying that, it's a perfectly addictive and playable dungeon-crawler in its own right.

The ultimate objective is to hunt down some artefacts, something that will take a considerable amount of time

to do. With a limited number of lives on the normal difficulty mode, this is a challenge barely worth attempting. Stick to wuss mode to give yourself infinite lives, whereupon the only penalty for dying is a setback to your previous checkpoint.

Kill enemies by charging up your psi power and releasing it in an area-attack blast. Collect the gems they leave behind and bring these gems to machines which improve the speed at

which you charge, the speed at which you cool down after blasting, and your shield. Enemies fire bullets at you, which you must avoid as you charge, making *Meritous* feel like the bastard-child of a shmup and a dungeon-crawler. It's very basic, but with 3,000 rooms and a handful of different enemy types, it's interesting enough to keep you playing for a while. And you'll hoot with glee when you come across massive seams of gems.



Forever destined to be stuck in a circle.



Look, some stars!



Meritous: play on easy or you're a goner.



DRILLER

Dev: Ovine | driller.ovine.net

CRASH GAVE IT 97%, *Zapp!* gave it 96%, and *PC ZONE* wasn't around to review it (but we did give *Mr Driller* 80%). It could only be *Driller*, the 1987 classic which saw you exploring an elaborate moonbase in an effort to mine precious gases. Some rooms presented you with puzzles, other fired lasers at you from unknown orifices, but all of them were eye-blisteringly three-dee.

It's been completely remade by Ovine, the same guys who remade the frankly

amazing *Cholo* (issue 165), so you no longer have to struggle with old *Driller*'s basic vector graphics and frame-rates of one and two.

Instead, you'll be treated to glorious textures and frame-rates smoother than Britney Spear's head, which isn't actually very smooth at all. New *Driller* remains as difficult as old *Driller* was 20 years ago, and actually succeeding at the simplest of tasks requires skills earnable only through

dying over and over again. Persevere though, and there's some retro gold on offer here.



Now in even better 3D!



No hammers here, thank you.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

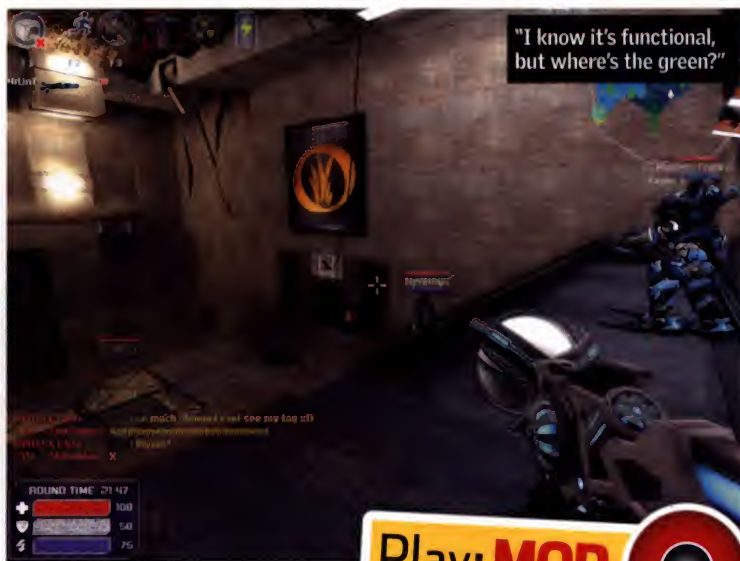
Where's Waldo?



Dev: A marketing lady, perhaps
whereswaldo.com

On the official *Where's Waldo?* (ugh) website, there's an absolutely free chance to look for Waldo/Wally – no more skulking around libraries for you! What is it with Wally anyway, why the hell does he stand in large crowds of similarly dressed people? Is he some sort of agoraphobic, fetishist pervert? And who are his mysterious friends? There was the female version of Wally, called Wenda, who we're supposed to assume is his sister, girlfriend or both. There's his dog, who tries its best to permanently damage your retinas by only showing a millimetre of his tail sticking out from behind some crates.

And then there was Odlaw, the evil version of Wally. He signified this through his yellow-and-black clothing and his evil moustache. It was once implied he took a shit on Wally's mantelpiece, but this was never clarified.



Play: **MOD**



DYSTOPIA V1 Jon Blyth rearranges his meatspace

dystopia-game.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

IT'S BEEN THREE years in development, and 18 months since the first playable version of *Dystopia* was released. Since that release, it's been nothing but plaudits, accolades, Mod Of The Month awards, and that most impressive thing, a Wikipedia entry for a mod that doesn't have a notice at the top saying 'This article does not meet the notability requirements, and should be lumped in with all the other mods using this engine'.

Dystopia v1 is the cyberpunk multiplayer mod that pits the Punks

against the Corps. It may be a 27-year-old sci-fi cliché, but translating that dirty 'hi-tech low-life' chestnut into a balanced multiplayer game is where the *Dystopia* developers' genius lies.

Character selection has you choosing light, heavy, or medium weapons class, and each has its own range of three or four unique weapons, from the weedier bolt guns to a beefy rocket launcher with a ten-second reload time. The benefit of choosing a lighter class is in your headspace and bodyspace slots, which

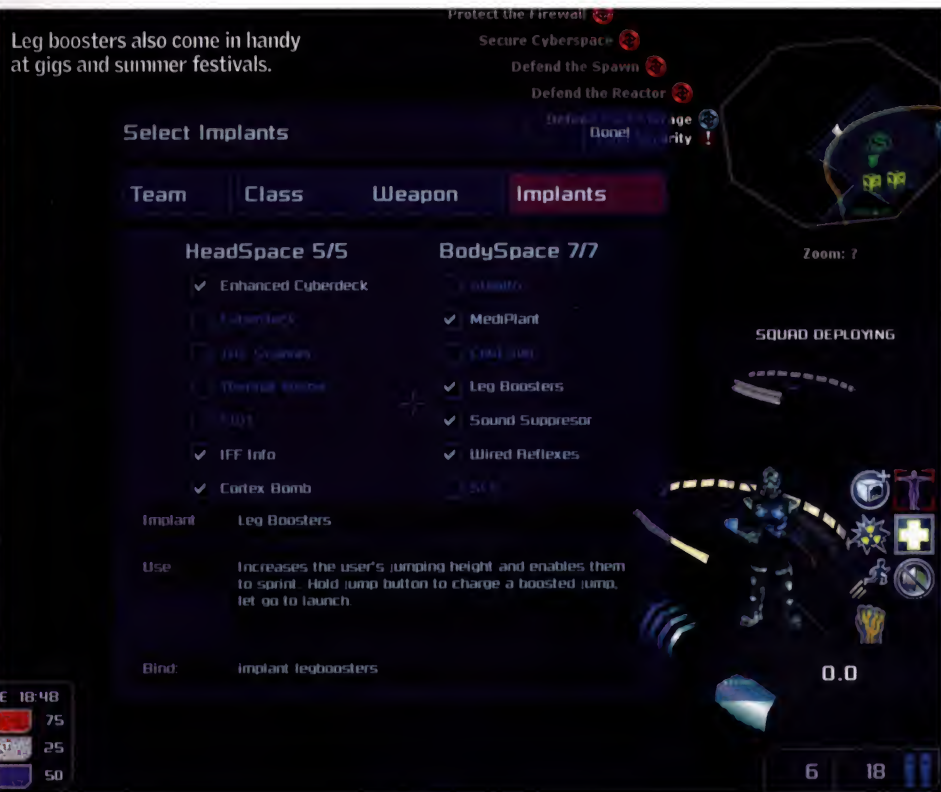
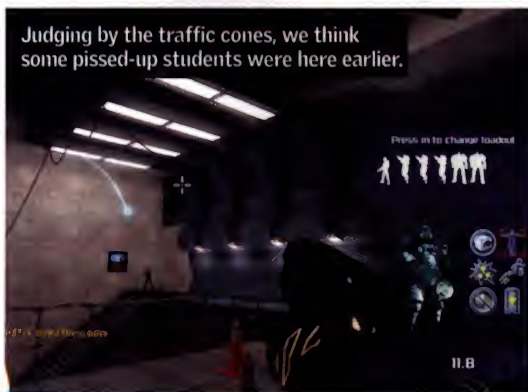
allow you to pepper yourself with upgrades, such as stealth (too costly for anything other than the lighter classes), and the ability to hack into cyberspace.

And that's where *Dystopia* distinguishes itself – the *Tron*-like representation of cyberspace, in which hackers will find themselves speeding through neon-lit tunnels, hacking into systems to open doors in meatspace and laying encryption to slow down the enemy hackers (which you can speed up with a mini-game, if you gave your

character the enhanced interface).

While you're in cyberspace, you're a sitting duck for the other team's guns, grenades and katana; or they can opt for the more humiliating Goomba attack, where they jump on your head and blow you up with their shoes.

It's not instantly accessible, but it makes sense, it works and it's a lot of fun. Make sure you download the latest version – at the time of writing, Vapour was only offering the older release. Get it before it goes commercial.



RAGNAROK ARENA



Half-Life goes side-on www.ragnarokarena.com | Mod for: Half-Life

SIDE-SCROLLING DEATHMATCH mods set in the *Half-Life* universe are sparse, like atoms in a crazy Internet mod vacuum. Only recently we reviewed maybe the only other one of its kind, the slightly not-so-great *Antfarm: Spheres*. It was awash with problems, not least of which was the fact that it felt so unresponsive and glitchy to play. *Ragnarok Arena* is a far more polished outing for the genre though, with some well designed and original maps based on areas from *Half-Life*, alongside some decent new weapons to boot.

They've slapped on some lovely retro styling too, with the pixelated menu screen and brilliant sound effects making the whole affair that bit more interesting. File it under 'no bugger's playing it' though, and put on your coaxing hat as you try and convince a few of your mates to download, install and take the time to play it with you. If you manage to get a game going however, it's the best merging of platforming and *Half-Life* you're likely to see in your lifetime and in the lifetime of your children.



We love this, but nobody's playing it.

Orange is the choice colour for pipes.

Play: MOD



GUTTER RUNNERS



Like Mousehunt without Lee Evans gr.hl2files.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

RATS ARE SMALL, man is big. But now let's take a minute to consider what life would be like if both were big, and rats were intelligent, and angry, and it was medieval sort of times.

Now you're thinking about *Gutter Runners*, a *Half-Life 2* mod which sees mutant rat people emerge from the earth to attack the town of Skavo.

Obviously, it's a deathmatch between the human townsfolk and the massive rodents, with the human side being broken into three classes – one with a gun, one with a crossbow and one sneaky one with daggers. The gutter runners (that is, the rats – try to keep up), are made up of an agile fighter rat with massive claws, a magic rat who can

shoot lightning and a dirty, stinking rat who throws glass orbs filled with poison gas. Can you guess which team everybody wants to be on?

As it's springtime, and as Australian people do not believe in mods (they've got too much sunshine to frolic in), don't expect to hop on to a populated server

right away. Instead, tell your friends you're organising an intervention and to meet you at your house, then when they all arrive, make them play with you on your impromptu LAN. They'll thank you in the end. Either that, or they'll never speak to you again.



"One sliced 'n' diced rat, coming right up..."

Play: MOD



Splinters-up-the-bum time.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN



WITH MAXIS SENIOR DESIGNER: ALEX HUTCHINSON

Say what?

If developers want to find a larger audience, they should stop alienating most people – the average human is baffled by many things gamers take for granted. Years of genre exposure and game-playing has trained us to understand what a goblin should look like, why high dexterity would be useful, or why the right analog stick generally operates the camera.

One reason licensed games sell big numbers (despite being generally poor facsimiles of other, better games) is because they allow people to start playing from a position of knowledge. Equally, *The Sims* succeeds partly because the in-game problems and solutions match real-world situations, making it easier for casual players to succeed. The more you can allow natural logic to help the player in your games, the faster they'll pick it up and the less effort you'll need to spend later on tutorials or complicated, artificial feedback that can fill in the gaps.

Worse, running in the opposite direction can not only fail to attract new players, it can lose old ones. Sequels that complexify their original mechanics to appeal to their hardcore fanbase often cannibalise their audience. Within Maxis, the feeling is that *SimCity 4* was the best of the series for the hardcore, but it completely missed its previously broad audience by only adding features that appealed to existing fans and losing some of the simple quality of the original.

I once saw a woman freak out during a playtest when her avatar died – she had no concept that death was impermanent and irrelevant in games. I explained it was just a way of telling her she'd failed a challenge and asked her to try again. "But I'm dead!" she cried. I asked her whether she wanted to play again. She politely declined.

SPORE IS DUE OUT LATER THIS YEAR – WWW.SPORE.COM

Take your PC gaming to the next level

Windows Vista brings a whole host of next-generation features to the discerning PC gamer. Here are just a few that you need to know about



Windows Vista is the brand new version of Windows. Not only does it offer huge improvements in security, usability and appearance over Windows XP, but it's also primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it in the near future.

It all revolves around DirectX 10, the next-generation interface that games programmers are going to be using to push the boundaries of 3D games. DirectX 10 brings with it incredible new levels of detail and the ability to have more complex objects moving around in each scene. The result is stunning and offers a much more cinematic experience. Want to see what we're talking about? Just take a look at the in-game

footage of *Crysis* at www.crysis-online.com. You'll be blown away.

There are other improvements, too. Windows Vista also introduces a new Games Explorer, which will make all your games accessible from one single location. And if you share your PC with your kids, then you'll be happy to know that there are built-in parental controls to prevent them playing games that are unsuitable for their ages. Also, if you own an Xbox 360, it's good to know that its wireless controllers will work with Windows Vista as well.

So, if you want to stay current with your PC gaming, then Windows Vista is the way to go. Oh, and those massive improvements in PC security, usability and appearance? Don't worry, they're all thrown in for free. ☑

Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

Don't panic, there's every chance that your PC will run Windows Vista without any upgrades at all, especially if it's already capable of playing the latest 3D games. However, all PCs are not created equal, and to ensure that you get the best gaming experience, only PCs that are worthy can upgrade to Windows Vista.

It's easy to find out if your current PC meets the necessary hardware requirements – simply download the free Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor from www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready. Run it on your PC and you'll get the definitive verdict on whether your computer is up to running Windows Vista.

Windows Vista gives each PC a Windows Experience rating that tells you at a glance how powerful your

processor, graphics card, memory and hard drive are, with a single combined score. The higher the number it comes up with, up to a current maximum of 5.9, the better your PC will be able to run Windows Vista and whatever games you want to play on it.



RATE YOUR PC Get an at-a-glance rating to find out how well your PC will run Windows Vista.

Game information

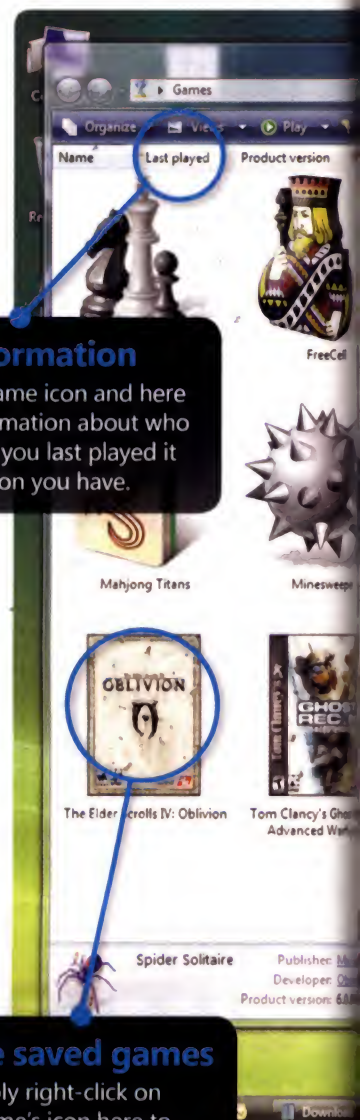
Click on any game icon and here you'll see information about who made it, when you last played it and what version you have.

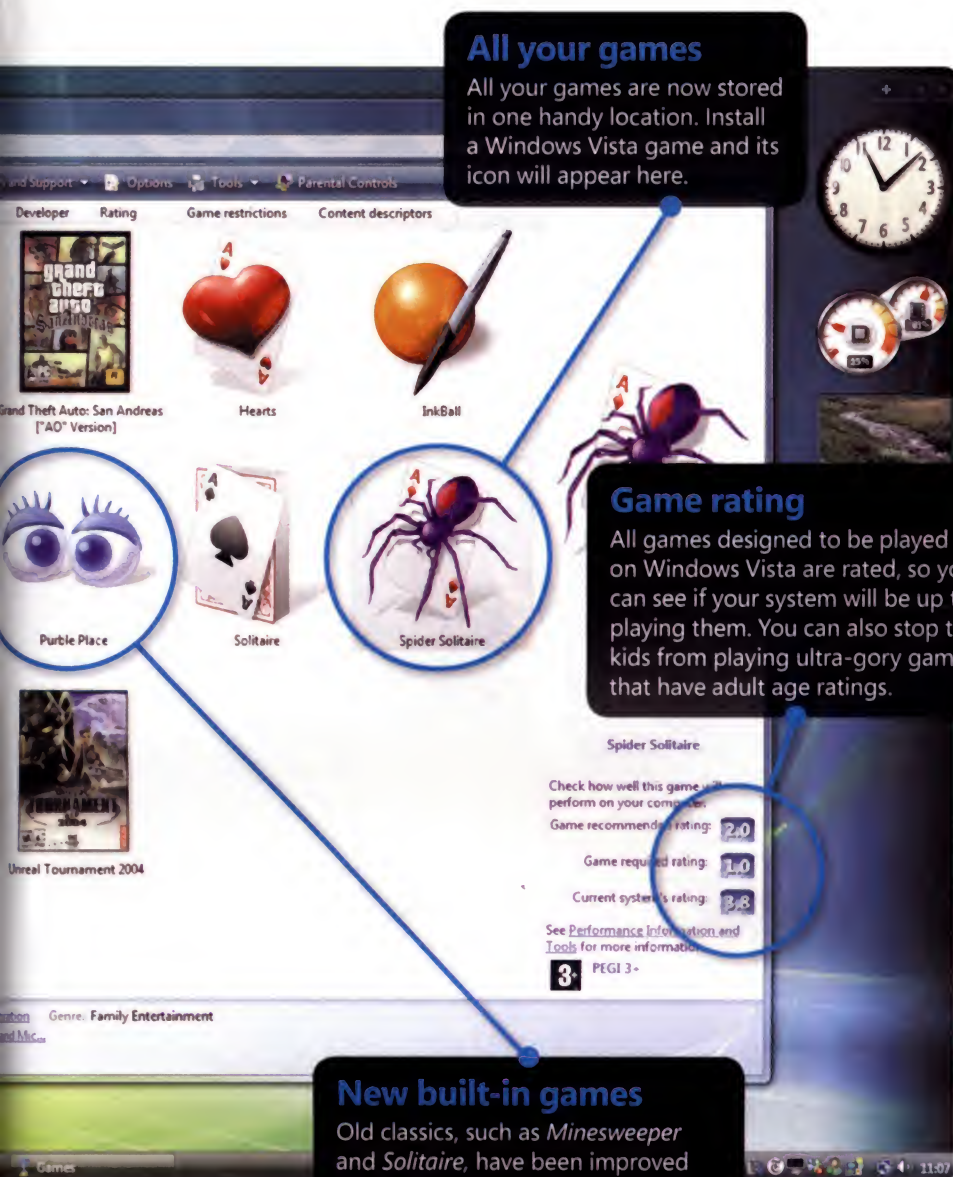
See saved games

Simply right-click on a game's icon here to get to the Saved Games folder where you can access your saves.

Media Center

The brilliant Windows Media Center lies at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect your PC to your HDTV and browse your music and videos. Also, with Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play back, record and timeshift TV programmes! Get Windows Media Center Extender and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, it has this Extender capability built into it.



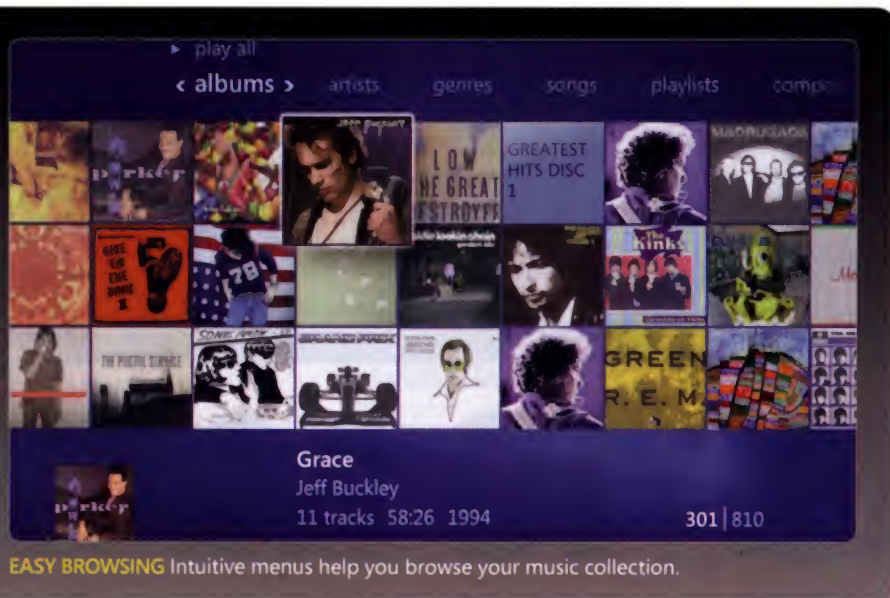


Get more from your PC with Windows Vista: The Official Magazine

Whether you're already running Windows Vista, or thinking about upgrading, the Windows Vista Magazine tells you everything you need to know

We'll show you...

- ➔ How to buy a new Windows Vista PC – what to look out for and what to avoid
- ➔ How to buy hardware and software that's guaranteed to work with Windows Vista
- ➔ How to get started with the new programs and features
- ➔ How to rip, burn and organise your music – and stream it to your Xbox 360
- ➔ How to set up an online radio station
- ➔ Widescreen monitors for every budget
- ➔ And much more!



Issue four is out now
Find out more at
www.windowsvistamagazine.co.uk



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Fight Club



4th rule of Fight Club: death becomes us

OH COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE – if games were women, you would be an alluring harlot. You would wear a sparkly red dress and stumble down the streets in your ill-fitting high heels, caring not a jot for us. We feel dirty after playing you, but because you're not actually a lady of the night but merely a popular online shooter, we needn't feel too bad about it. In fact, we think it's quite fun.

And so another month of getting shot by our readers has passed, with Log's chilling hunt for the final CT meeting a grisly end, despite everybody cheering, "GO LOG!" and "LOG LOG LOG!" at him from beyond the grave.

If you'd like to join in, meet us at 6pm on Thursday, May 3, where we'll be playing the *Desert Conflict* mod for *Battlefield 2*. If you want to know more, check out www.pczone.co.uk.

ZONE CHAT



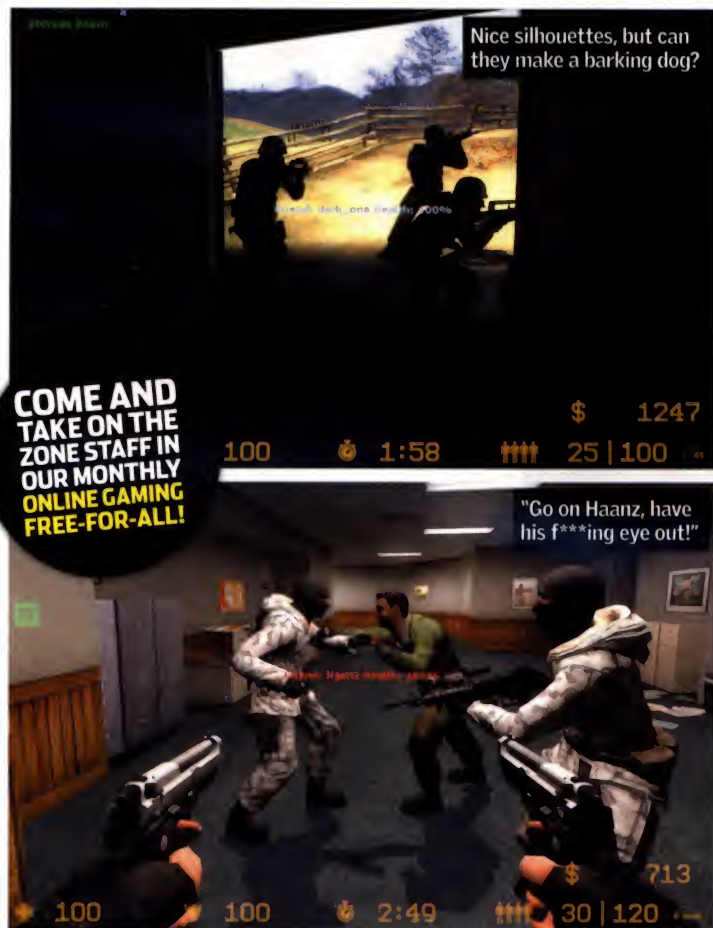
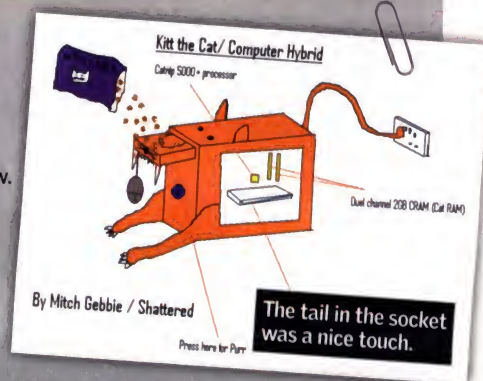
Chitter-chatter, nitter-natter...

THIS MONTH'S ZONE CHAT

was a resounding success, despite taking place while our entire office was being moved piece-by-piece to the exact same location two floors below. Imagine all of us perched at odd angles, typing on dusty laptops haphazardly balanced on towers of cardboard boxes, and you're imagining something far funnier than the reality of our move.

As ever, chat revolved around PC gaming in general, but also about Nintendo's pun-riddled *Nintendogs* game. This in turn led to conversations about a suitable cat-based pun, which then, in a desperate move to bring our fair PCs into the fray, led to a competition to draw what you thought a cat spliced with a PC would look like. We had literally thousands of entries, definitely not just four, and this entry from Mitch Gebbie won it because we like the Whiskas going into the CD tray. His prize was a copy of *Virtua Tennis 3*. Kudos also goes to our other entries, which cleverly used CAT5 cable puns, as well as jokes based on the mouse peripheral.

Next month's *ZONE Chat* takes place on at 5.30pm on Wednesday, May 2, where we'll have more prizes and more gene-splicing fun. See you there!



COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

How to join in!



If you fancy joining the *ZONE Chat*, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps because you're a Leeds/Southend Utd fan and life is just so unfair at the moment – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some PC ZONE staff might even be there. The latest info can always be found at www.pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

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Retro ZONE

To those about to *SEUCK* – we salute you...

CONSTRUCTION KITS

EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH

BUT HOW?

To play *The Incredible Machine* or *Pinball Construction Set*, you need DOSBox and an ability to navigate the pop-up ads on the excellent Home Of The Underdogs site. *STAC* and *SEUCK* ran on the Atari ST (use the STEem Engine), and a better version of *SEUCK* ran on the Amiga. *Racing Destruction Set* was at its best on the C64, so use CCS64 or VICE. As for *Music Construction Set*, just download Audacity and have a proper mash-up.

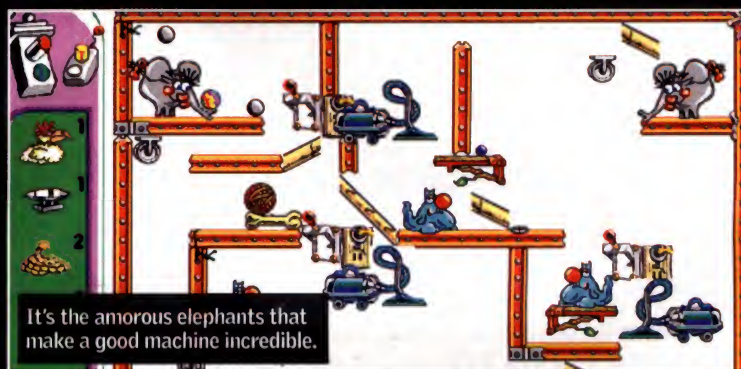
Links...

- 1 The Underdogs**
www.the-underdogs.info
Home Of The Underdogs is a great place for abandonware, which you should download very carefully.
- 2 STEem engine**
steem.atari.st
Download the STEem Engine for the Atari ST to play games like *STAC*, *MCS*, *RDS* and *SEUCK*.

GAMES. I THINK we're all in agreement here, that games are a good thing. In another era, we would have been enthusiasts of the Victorian parlour game, frowned upon by the clergy for indulging ourselves in such whimsical pursuits. "We introduced these parlour games to help with your homework, and you're just pretending to be an olden-days Robocop," the moral guardians of the era would complain.

So, how do we silence our internal mothers and pretend that our game-playing habits are anything other than a waste of time? Nowadays, we make helicopters in *Garry's Mod*, but in the '80s, there was the Construction Set genre. We didn't just play the same old tracks on *Super Sprint*, we were magicians and creators. We sculpted our own tracks, like an impossible Scalextric. With the *ST Adventure Creator*, you could learn a little programming language, then make your own text-only adventures. Albeit an adventure that rarely ended in anything other than instant nudity, wolves and skeletons stabbing you in the knees. (You did it too, stop looking like that.)

So, this page is dedicated to you if you sat patiently while a raytracing program on the Atari ST rendered a sphere near a table. It's for anyone who ran around to their mate's house after



It's the amorous elephants that make a good machine incredible.

With the *ST Adventure Creator*, you could learn a programming language, then make text-only adventures

making a schmup called *Attack Of Bum 17* where you fended off wave after wave of escaped experimental derrieres.

These games might well be what steered us gently towards PC gaming; the ability to muck about, and feel like

we're in control is what makes us love *The Movies*, *Armadillo Run*, *Garry's Mod*, sandboxes and anything that transforms limited games into unlimited toys. Along with love and art, they're a massive part of why it's cool to be human.

SIX OF THE BEST

Some of the construction kits we've known and loved

SEUCK
The *Shoot Em Up Construction Kit* ensured magazines were inundated with terrible schmups.

RACING DESTRUCTION SET
It was called 'slot racing' and it came in a square padded box. And it was sexy.

STAC
The *ST Adventure Creator* was fine for text-only, but if you fancied your hand at graphics, you went for GAC.

MCS
The *Music Construction Set* meant you could pretend to your parents that you were practising piano.

PCK
The *Pinball Construction Kit* meant you could jump, spin and punch the glass when you lost a ball, virtually.

THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE
Inspired Heath-Robinson nonsense with buckets, pulleys and balloons.

NOW & THEN

World In Conflict vs Tank Wars

NOW



WORLD IN CONFLICT

TANKS HAVE ALWAYS been heavily featured in games, right from the humble tank-based text adventures of old ("You are in a tank, there are exits to the North and East"), up to the tank-centric strategy epics of today ("You are in a shiny tank with volumetric smoke billowing out, there are brilliant-looking exits to the North and East"). *World In Conflict* is one of the new generation of tank games, and because we're so riled up about tanks right now, we're going

THEN

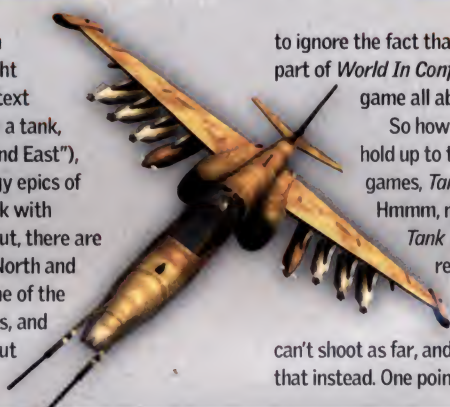


TANK WARS

to ignore the fact that tanks make up only a small part of *World In Conflict*, and pretend that it's a game all about tanks.

So how does this tank-centric game hold up to the benchmark of all tank games, *Tank Wars* (1986, DOS)?

Hmmm, not very well we're afraid. In *Tank Wars*, your tanks can shoot really far, they're more like artillery guns than tanks. In *World In Conflict*, the tanks can't shoot as far, and there are artillery guns to do that instead. One point to *Tank Wars* then.



PLAY IT!

Luckily, because *Tank Wars* is so retro, it's been remade so many times that the copyright's washed right off...

- 1 Yeah, no real copyright. Doesn't mean you should play the original though as it's not so hot these days.
- 2 Go to www.addictinggames.com/tankwars.html
- 3 Possibly sit through a really awful Flash advertisement for Ratchet & Clank or the US Navy Seals or something.
- 4 Do not join the Navy.
- 5 Enjoy *Tank Wars* in all its remade Flash glory.



MAME FRAME

MIKIE Developer: Konami | Year: 1984

WHEN YOUR LIVES left are represented by American flags, you know you're in for some good, all-American fun. Some apple-pie, stars-and-stripes, wholesome headbutting action. Mikey wants to see his girlfriend, but that means collecting hearts from every room in the school, smashing your face against glass and human alike.

Mikie was too hard to be fun for anyone other than the twitchiest of addicts, and the most interesting thing – apart from the weird musical hybrid

of *La Bamba* and *Impossamole* on the second level – is the alternate version. The result of a committee meeting, where you can hear people saying "this is an all-American game, and you run around headbutting teachers. Isn't that a bit run?" So they made another version, where you shouted at them instead.

In the watered down version, the blackboard reads 'Failure Teaches Success', instead of 'E=MC2'. Sure it does, Konami, especially when failure costs us 10p a go...



MIKIE



Smell that your highness.

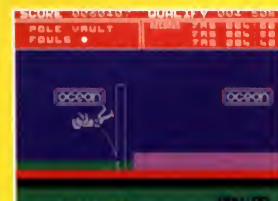


They're even after you between the levels.



Headbutt jars, collect the hearts.

READER'S BACK IN THE DAY...



Joystick wagglers

by Jon Gilbey, aged 37 & 4/5

Having bought *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* on the Speccy, I shelled out for the Kempston Interface, and then bought the joystick to go with it – the Quickshot 1. Finally, I had an excuse to spend hours in my bedroom frantically flapping my hand in my lap. It was like a dream come true, except for the rude interruptions of my confused mother.

These games were good training for the real thing. A few years later, I was introduced to a game on the Amiga that had a similar premise, only this time you were animating pornographic sequences. Which, given that joystick waggling is a two-handed sport, is a fatally flawed – if more honest – concept.

Send your recollections to letters@pczone.co.uk

WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator, currently emulating over 6,000 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.

SUPERTEST

101 BEST GAMES EVER



Let the irresolvable bickering commence...

YOUR VIEW

Last month was console ports, but after persistent definitional problems, we loosened the belt a bit to include dual-development PC versions...

TONY HAWKS 3

"For some reason, the only port I can think of is *Tony Hawks 3*, because that got given to Gearbox and they made a good job of it. Everything felt solid and easily workable."

Psychoseal

HALO

"*Halo* was great – the multiplayer CTF game was crack-like in its appeal. It still has the best vehicular combat available, and shows a nicely cunning and devious streak for map design."

speakafreaka

MR DRILLER

"*Mr Driller* still has a place in my desktop icons. The only other console port that had me hooked was *Rogue Squadron*, which was ace."

Sunscramble

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

"The main game slipped slightly compared to 1 and 3, but was still a great story with more VR missions than was strictly necessary."

ckinnerley

PSYCHONAUTS

"The best conversion was *Psychonauts*. Is it too early to talk about *BioShock* being 'console-led', or is that too painful still?"

Andy Monahans

ONE PERSON'S TERRORIST, people will often say in a pompous tone, like they're the first person who ever said it, is another person's freedom fries.

And when it comes to compiling lists of the 101 Best Games Ever (see p47 for more), one person's passionate conviction is another person's stubborn lunacy. One that may well make you lean over the table and spit: "In what maniac's world is *System Shock 2* not in the Top 10?" But they just punch you in the face and bellow: "*Morrowind* was a better game than *Oblivion*, you drool-smearing cretin." Then you go to the pub, open up a packet of crisps on the table so everyone can share them, only to have them crushed by an indignant fist when it's suggested that *Magic Carpet 2* has dropped out of the Top 101 altogether.

We think the main problem was that there wasn't enough of us arguing, and that the argument wasn't taking place on the Internet, where all the best and most

productive arguments have taken place, since the first person on a 9600 baud modem dialled up the second person's computer and called him a n00b.

Do you disagree with our list? Do you have an arbitrary problem with our arbitrariness? Perhaps you think *Cave Story* is better than *GTR2*, or perhaps you're opposed to the very idea of lists? Whatever your stance, you can hear our argument on the DVD, then log onto our forums at www.pczone.co.uk, where there'll be a thread waiting for you to stamp right in and demand how we could leave *Railroads!* out.



Will *Worms* make it into the top three?



Will: easily shocked, easily aroused.



Sefton perfects the simpleton's lean.



Let's continue this in the sewers.



"OK then, we'll sort it out with guns."

Perhaps you think *Cave Story* is better than *GTR2*, or perhaps you hate lists...

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill heads for the Dark Portal in *The Burning Crusade*...

BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL, the sinister agents of the Burning Legion have renewed their demonic crusade to consume the magic of the universe and lay waste to all in their path. Not my words – although I will be invoicing for them – but those on the back of the *Burning Crusade* box. Open the front of the box using the clever Velcro gatefold arrangement, and there's the portal itself, beyond which, apparently, A New World Awaits.

Sadly not for the likes of me though, a lowly level three Dranei Priest with a big hammer and a bad frown. Killing insects and plucking flowers is my lot, destined to live a life of drudgery, with tales of derring-do beyond the portal but mere rumours down here in Ammen Vale. What I'm trying to say is that if you think I'm dicking about with this lark until I get to the required level 58, then you've grossly misread the situation.

However, there is a way. Word reaches me of a high-level mage name of Diastar (aka Tony Smith), who allegedly has access to a back passage. A come-and-get-me plea is issued, and Diastar immediately mounts his

trusty steed to fetch me, arriving just as I'm inoculating an owl.

HIP PRIEST

"Hello Sir!" exclaims Master Sergeant Diastar, respectfully.

He's resplendently dressed, and as I point out: "That's a handsome outfit you have there."

"That's very kind," says Diastar. "I like to think the shoulder pads are a bit Versace."

As if by magic he creates a portal in front of my eyes and invites me to step in. Suddenly I'm in Outlands, surrounded by the most exotic creatures, many of whom look at me in disgust, a bald man in a dress mingling with the beautiful people.

"Let's take a walk," suggests Diastar, and leads me into the Terokkar Forest, a sinister fairytale woodland with a winding path midst the foreboding shadows.

My fear isn't misplaced. As Diastar explains: "At level three, you'll pull bad guys from six miles away. I'll try and keep you alive, but you'll die a few times."

The words have barely left his mouth when a giant moth instantly beheads me.

"OK, let's try again," says Diastar on my return. "You go in front, just follow the road."

Gingerly, I edge forward, with Diastar watching my back and repelling any foes. "This is terrifying," I say, and for possibly the first time in any goblin land, it's actually tense. Diastar manfully intercepts a giant spider before it can get to me, but again a moth strikes from nowhere.

THE MIGHTY FYNN

"Sorry about this," says my alleged protector. "I'm calling in some help."

That help arrives in the form of Fynn, and I struggle to suppress a laugh when a 2ft dwarf introduces himself. What's he going to do, bite their ankles? His skills belie his stature though, and between the pair of them they smite any foes while I hide behind a tree shitting myself. We're about halfway to the Hellfire Peninsula, but the sheer weight of numbers is against us, and reluctantly we decide to curtail the journey, shamefully teleporting back to where we began.

The Dark Portal still seems a distant dream, but Fynn claims that if we can rope in a third person I can be summoned there. Volunteers are thin on the ground, but we pressgang an American called Montes, who agrees to help in exchange for some water. All three then desert me, and I wander the Outlands alone, stopping only to have a staring competition with an elephant.

Finally I'm summoned somewhere, and instructed to talk to a Hippogryph Master. Politely asking for a single ticket to the Dark Portal, she sternly informs me that I don't have enough money. Diastar generously supplies the readies, and suddenly I'm on the back of a giant bird, swooping o'er hill and vale. It's an exhilarating ride, high above the greenery of Telaar and Negrاند, cocking a snook to the murderous beasts of Terokkar Forest, traversing The Bone Wastes and Hellfire Peninsula, and finally alighting on The Stair Of Destiny.

I BELIEVE I CAN FLY

"Where's the portal," I ask, and am pointed towards the massive throbbing portal-shaped thing at the top of the stairs. Exactly as pictured on the box, it's an awe-inspiring sight, and I run up the stairs like Rocky, punching the air in elation. My new friends join me, and we dance a jig in celebration. Posing for a photo, Fynn drops his trousers and moons at me.

Frivolity aside, the moment of destiny is upon us. Wishing each other luck, in unison we step into the unknown, re-emerging on the other side blissfully intact.

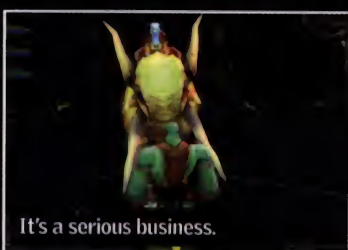
"Cheers guys," I say. "I'm off down the pub to watch the England game." **END**



One for all and all for one.

Master Sergeant Diastar
<Gigaknights>

Fynn
<Gigaknights>



It's a serious business.



Behold the Dark Portal!



If he had hair, there'd be wind in it.

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

ARMED ASSAULT

An interview with Bohemia Interactive prompts
Jon Blyth to crawl across the floor on his stomach

WHEN BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE STUDIOS made *Operation Flashpoint*, they got critical acclaim, massive sales, a loyal fanbase of serious players and a modding community.

You'd think, from that point onwards, the Prague developers would have had their cushions plumped by anyone they chose – but after their split with Codemasters, it wasn't that simple, with little interest from big publishers and low resources forcing a staggered release for *Armed Assault* across Europe. With their sights now set on patches and a US release, we spoke to Bohemia's chief executive officer Marek Spáňal (left), and Markus Kurzawa (right), who's been working at Bohemia for three years, since being recruited from the modding community...



Armed Assault builds on the *Flashpoint* template, taking the gameplay to new heights.



01 BUILDING ON FLASHPOINT: Spáňal: "Many things in *Flashpoint* were limited by the hardware. We've made big changes in the density of the environments in *Armed Assault* – it's bigger, sure, but it's also far more packed. In *Flashpoint*, the areas were kind of empty, so you'd find there wasn't enough cover, plus there were tactics you couldn't fully utilise. So that's one part of the improvements – and of course, the visual quality is better. But there's other areas, which at the time of *Flashpoint* we didn't know about, or didn't have time to include. Notable are the improvements in the simulation of ballistics, so now bullets can get deflected, and if you hide behind a wooden fence, it's not really proper cover because the bullets will go through. All this isn't obvious on first play, but it's an example of us trying to make a deeper and deeper simulation."

Kurzawa: "There were a lot of changes that were implemented in *Armed Assault* that we were limited with in *Flashpoint*. For example, the multiple turrets are completely new, and we worked hard as modders to get anything working with that. There's a lot of stuff that went into *Armed Assault* that the regular players might not see, but if you're a modder, you'll notice that it's a lot easier. They've got much more power to create content and generate whatever they want to. There are still limitations, but far less than before."

02 DEVELOPMENT HELL: Spánel: "We released the game before Christmas in eastern and central Europe. The reason for this was simple: we ended up on our own with regards to everything. We're not a big company, and we had to release in order to get some income, it's as simple as that. There are sometimes not many choices you can make, it's either 'do something or do nothing'. We're completely independent developers and we didn't find a way to agree with any big publishers. A year ago, nobody believed in the game at all."



We don't think these buildings are going to stay like that for long...

03 MILITARY EXPERIENCE: Spánel: "To some extent, we have some experience of the military, but we're games developers primarily. Some of us did national service, but we're programmers, engineers and games developers. We've had feedback in recent years from many ex-military personnel and current military concerning the VBS1 training programmes (the 'professional' version of *Flashpoint*, used by the military). We always try to have such people as external advisors – for instance, some former marines do a lot of the testing, and these people help to make the game as realistic as possible combat-wise."

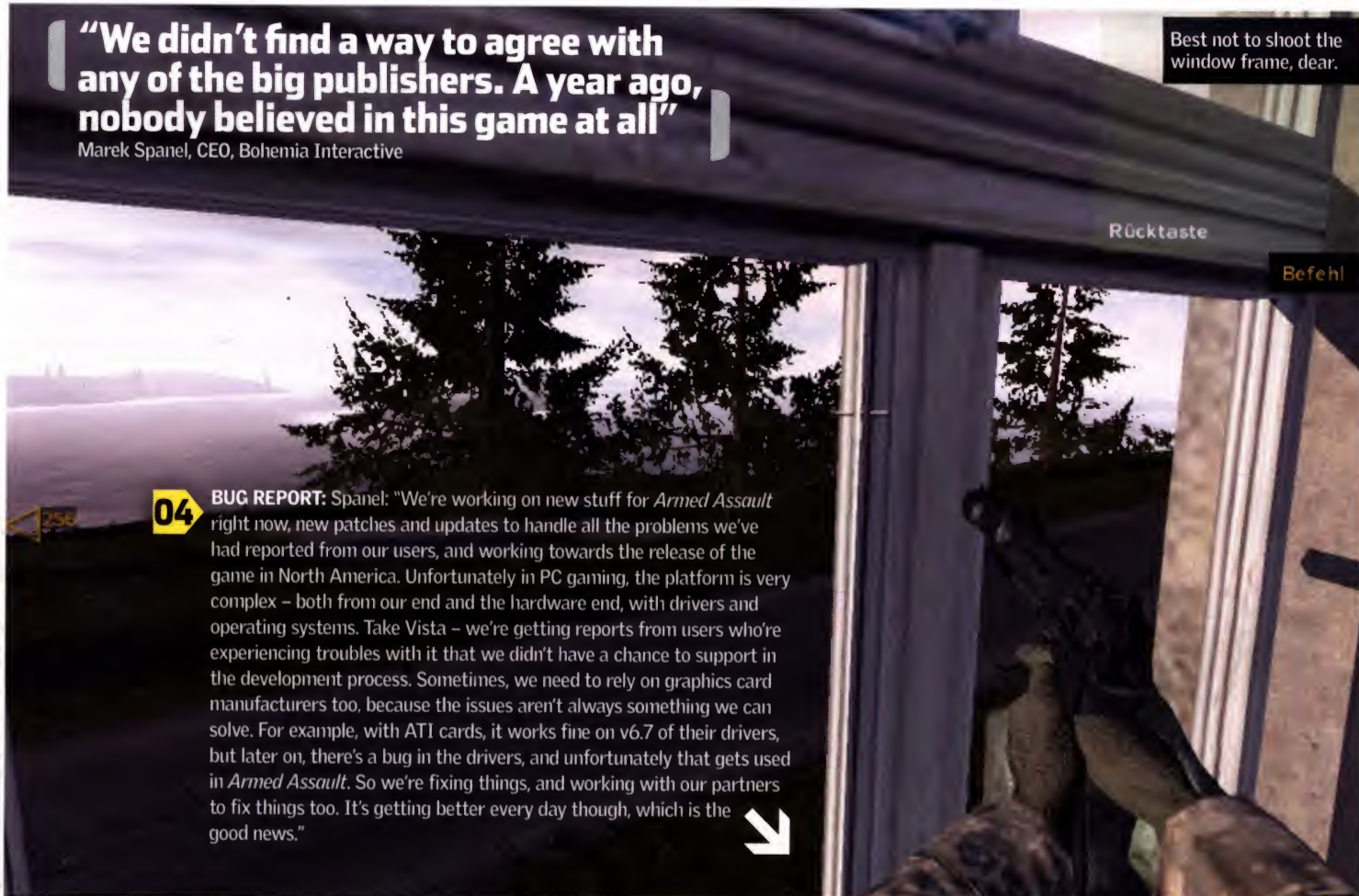


Yellow is the new camouflage.

"We didn't find a way to agree with any of the big publishers. A year ago, nobody believed in this game at all"

Marek Spánel, CEO, Bohemia Interactive

Best not to shoot the window frame, dear.



Rücktaste

Befehl

04 BUG REPORT: Spánel: "We're working on new stuff for *Armed Assault* right now, new patches and updates to handle all the problems we've had reported from our users, and working towards the release of the game in North America. Unfortunately in PC gaming, the platform is very complex – both from our end and the hardware end, with drivers and operating systems. Take Vista – we're getting reports from users who're experiencing troubles with it that we didn't have a chance to support in the development process. Sometimes, we need to rely on graphics card manufacturers too, because the issues aren't always something we can solve. For example, with ATI cards, it works fine on v6.7 of their drivers, but later on, there's a bug in the drivers, and unfortunately that gets used in *Armed Assault*. So we're fixing things, and working with our partners to fix things too. It's getting better every day though, which is the good news."



05 THERE GOES MOD: Spanel: "We've tried to make *Armed Assault* into a platform, so many things that were hard-coded in *Flashpoint*, we've made fully configurable, including the AI. It's really a platform for years to come, and not only in military training – we're hoping the gamers will come out with some really nice modifications, and already we're beginning to see some good stuff coming out. It's too early to be talking about full modifications, but there are some re-textured units that look very nice, some of the strong *Flashpoint* mod groups are working on new content, but it's going to take some time. If you check some of the sites like armedassault.info, there's a lot of stuff going on there."

War doesn't have to be all glum – everyone's got time for a spin on the Wheel Of Fortune.



If you like your war games hardcore, *Armed Assault* is for you.



06 GAMING SATISFACTION: Spanel: "The best moments for me are when we play in a co-op team of four or six, playing against the AI. Probably the best feeling is when you're outnumbered by enemies and you're feeling completely hopeless, and then you get help from a friend you weren't expecting." Kurzawa: "One of the memorable moments for me was lying in the grass, sniping, and a butterfly flew into the view of my scope. And I thought, 'You stupid butterfly, what are you doing there?' and then I thought 'Hey, wait, there's a butterfly!' No other game has butterflies in front of the scope. It's really satisfying that we got so many little details into there."



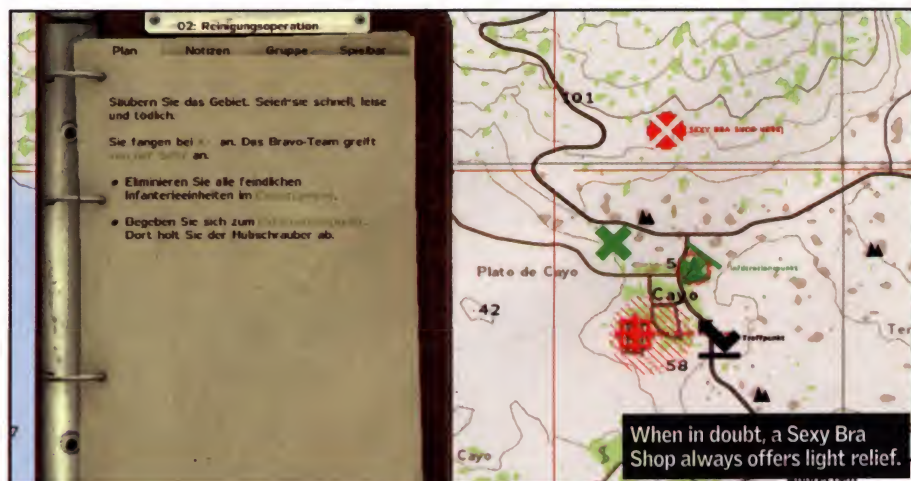
If green is your all-time favourite colour, *Armed Assault* is for you.

"We've tried to make *Armed Assault* a platform for years to come – we're hoping gamers will make some nice modifications"

Marek Spanel, CEO, Bohemia Interactive

07 COMING FROM THE COMMUNITY: Kurzawa: "I came to Bohemia from my work with mods. I was basically doing what I do now, concept writing and just getting stuff to work. For example, I did all the configs and scripting for a *Comanche*, and we really tried to push the limits. We have several former modders here, so I can say it happens quite often. Especially with the artists, for example – they know the programs we use to get stuff done. At the time of writing the mods, about one in ten were people who had prior experience of making stuff in *Flashpoint*. Because I'm formerly from the community, I understand their requests. However, because I'm working professionally on it now, I can also see that what the community imagines is really easy to do often isn't. So I'm in a position where I can say, 'I know what you mean, but we can't change it'. Of course, saying that, we try to implement as much of what the community wants as possible."

08 QUALITY ASSESSMENT: Spanel: "We're working on the US release now, and there's a QA procedure that we hope will be beneficial. Because the scope of the game is so massive, you give the game to one QA and get all that fixed, then you give it to another QA, and he'll come up with another list of things. It's so complex that anyone can find anything, and it's a never-ending process, with such an open-minded game with so many ways to go through it. We're also trying to improve the game, so with the latest patch we've changed how the 3D iron sights works, which is quite major. We basically listen to the feedback from the forums and the users, so we've reduced the fogging to make the community happy."



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reading...

they're for
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PCZONE

FUTURE PUBLISHING
2 BALCOMBE STREET
LONDON NW1 6NW

TEL: 020 7042 4720
EMAIL: letters@pczone.co.uk
FAX: 020 7042 4729
WEBSITE: www.pczone.co.uk

This month's question: if you could have a superpower, what would it be?

BARCELONA FC

Editor Jamie Sifton 020 7042 4721. Ice beams
Managing Editor Clare Lydon 020 7042 4723. Time travel
Deputy Editor Will Porter 020 7042 4725. So-so fighting
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Reviews Editor Suzy Wallace 020 7042 4726. Flying
Section Editor Steve Hogarty 020 7042 4728. Botany
Staff Writer Jon Blyth 020 7042 4724. Changing shape
Contributors Pavel Barter (Farting at will), Dan Grillopoulos, Steve Hill, Anthony Holden (Cheese ray), Alex Hutchinson, Sam Keldsen, Martin Korda (Meat missiles), Steve O'Hagan, Dan Mayers, Richie Shermalek, Phil Wand and Ed Zitron (Teleportation)
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Group Publisher James Binn
Assistant Publisher Lee Nutter. Faster metabolism
Advertising Manager Darren Gratton. Invisibility
Product Manager Helen Cullen
Marketing Executive Kim Brown
Circulation Manager Stuart Agnew
Classified Sales Craig Nutland
Production Co-ordinator Katty Skardon. Flying
Production Manager Rose Griffiths
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Managing Director UK Robert Price
Non-Executive Chairman Roger Parry
Chief Executive Stevie Spring
Group Finance Director John Bowman
Tel +44 1225 442244

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NEXT ISSUE PCZ #182

On sale Thursday, May 24. Which is the day before Suzy and Clare's sister Liz celebrate their birthdays. Hip, hip, hooray!



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All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. We're fickle like that.

NEXT MONTH

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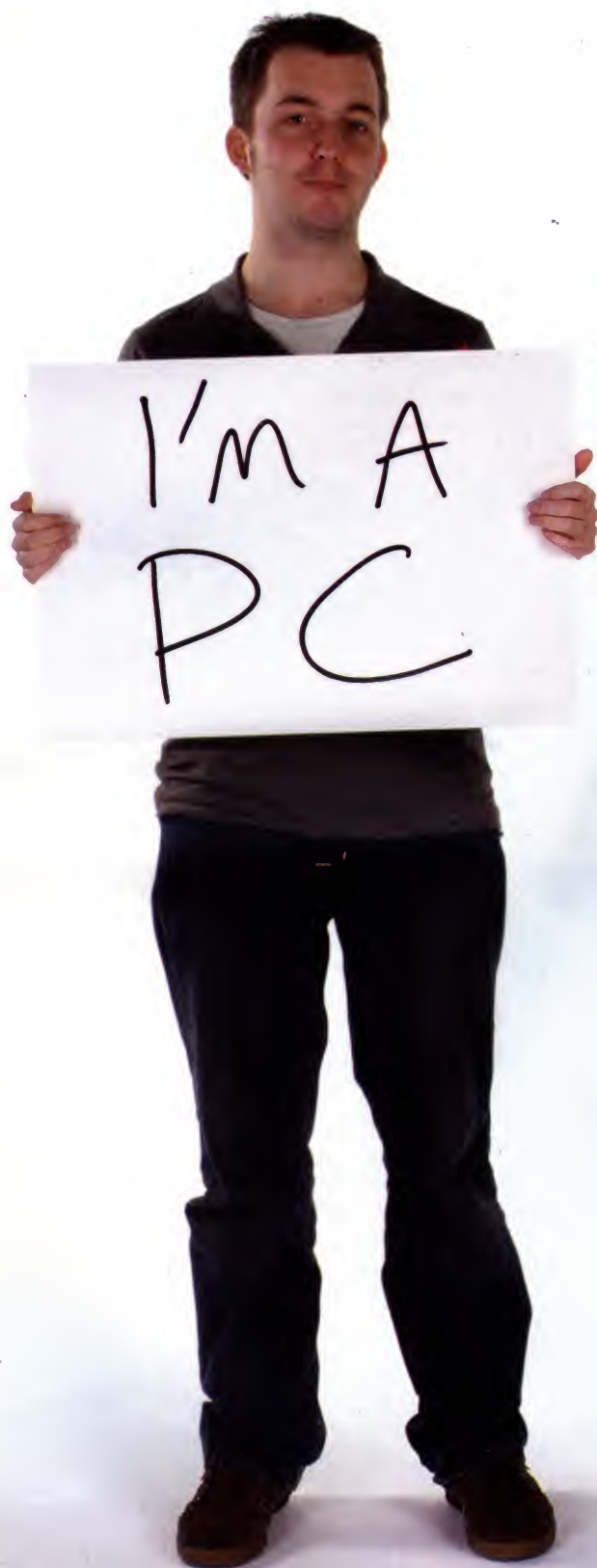
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